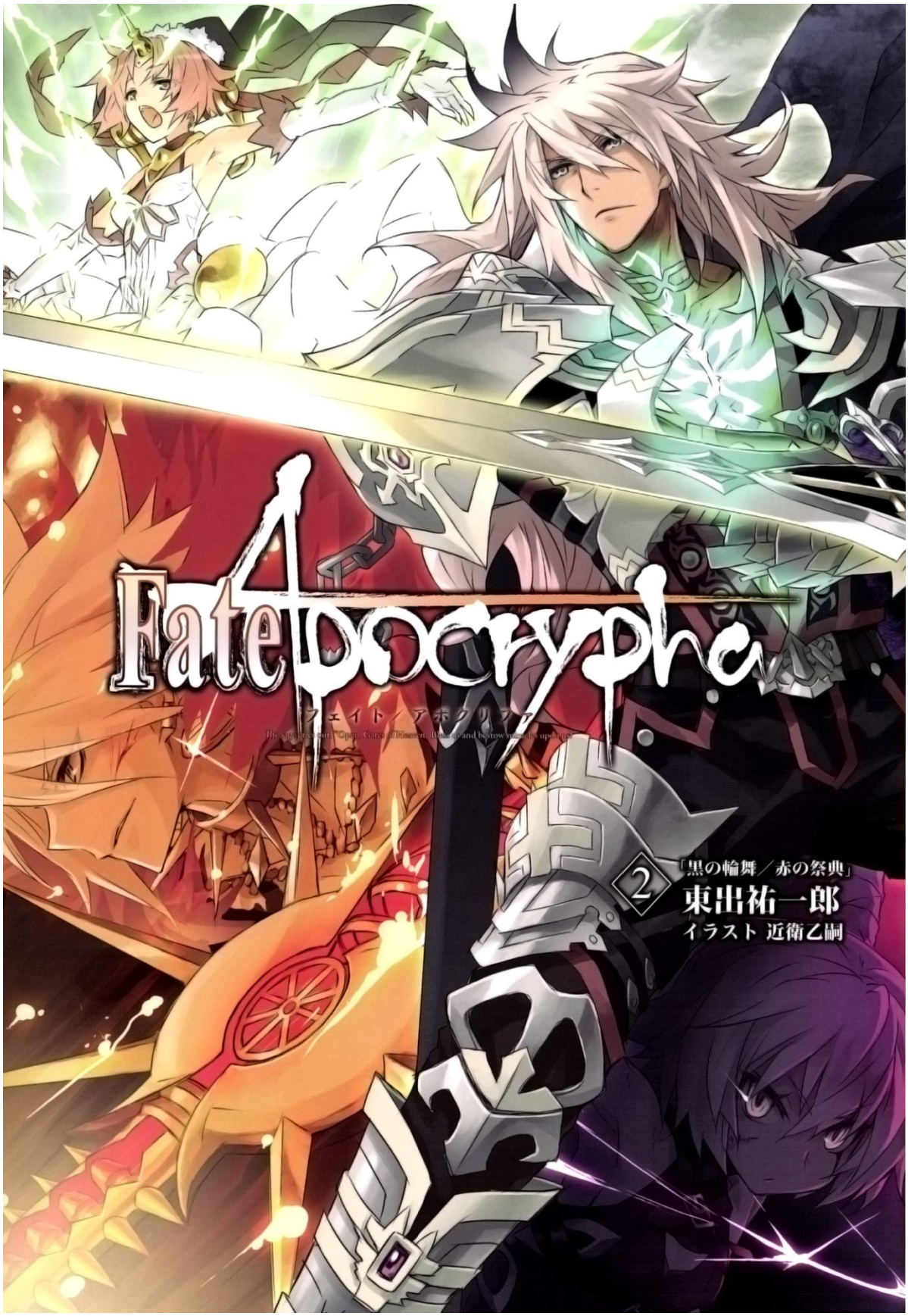
Fate Apocrypha
フェイト/アポクリファ
2
「黒の輪舞／赤の祭典」
東出祐一郎
イラスト 近衛乙嗣

Fate Apocrypha

フェイト／アポクリファ

The sage cries out. "Open, Gates of Heaven. Bless us and bestow miracles upon us!"

2

「黒の輪舞／赤の祭典」

東出祐一郎

イラスト 近衛乙嗣

Archer of "Black"

"黒"のアーチャー

Height/Weight:179cm/81kg
Blood type:unknown
Birthday:unknown

The Heroic Spirit of the bow contracted with Fiore. He is both a calm intellectual and an excellent military man. He devotes his loyalty to Fiore as a Servant, and also gives advice as a strategist.

Fiore Forvedge Yggdmillennia

フィオレ・フォルヴェッジ・ユグドミレニア

Height/Weight:162cm/47kg
Blood type:A
Birthday:7.12
Measurements:B84 W57 H82

A magus of the Yggdmillennia clan. Master of the Archer of "Black".
A female magus who gives off the impression of a sweet and lovely noblewoman.
She is the most talented magus in a clan filled with mostly second-rate magi, and she is recognized as the successor for the clan head Darnic.
Due to her Magic Circuit's mutation, both of her legs were paralyzed resulting her being stuck in a wheelchair for the rest of her life.

Rider of "Black"

“黒”のライダー

Height/Weight:164cm/56kg
Blood type:unknown
Birthday:unknown
Measurements:B71 W59 H73

The mounted soldier Heroic Spirit contracted with Celenike. A naïve and innocent pleasure-seeking knight.
He acts according to his own conscience and desires, and never regrets doing so. Though his stats are somewhat inferior to that of other Servants, he compensates for it with an abundance of Noble Phantasms, and he makes fun of his opponents.
He creates an unexpected situation in this Great Holy Great War due to his willful actions.

Celenike Icecolle Yggdmillennia

セレニケ・アイスコル・ユグドミレニア

Height/Weight:168cm/53kg
Blood type:AB
Birthday:12.11
Measurements:B86 W59 H88

A magus of the Yggdmillennia clan.
Master of the Rider of “Black”.
A cruel female magus who possesses a clever-looking beautiful face.
Her speciality is in the use of curses against others, and she is attached to Rider who she summoned.
She is in the Yggdmillennia faction, but she prioritizes her own selfish desires.

ロシェ・フレイン・ユグドミレニア

Height/Weight:152cm/45kg
Blood type:O
Birthday:9.15

A magus of the Yggdmillennia clan. Master of the Caster of "Black". Though a youth of thirteen years of age, he is well known as a golem user.

He respects Caster, who is also a golem user, as a teacher, and their relationship is closer to that of teacher and student than Master and Servant.

Frain Yggdmillennia

"黒"のキャスター

Height/Weight:161cm/52kg
Blood type:unknown
Birthday:unknown

The magus Heroic Spirit contracted with Roche. Though his direct combat abilities are low, he is a rare golem user, and he bears the role of increasing his side's pawns in the war.

Caster "Black"

Assassin of "Black"

"黒"のアサシン

Height/Weight:150cm/45kg
Blood type:unknown
Birthday:unknown
Measurements:B69 W49 H71

The assassin Heroic Spirit contracted with Reika Rikudou.
She was a serial killer in life, and calls her Master "Mother".
She views both the "Black" and "Red" faction as enemies in this Great Holy Grail War, and tries to annihilate all the Servants.

Reika Rikudou

六導玲霞

Height/Weight:164cm/53kg
Blood type:B
Birthday:1.9
Measurements:B90 W62 H89

Master of the Assassin of Black.
She is a prostitute who was used as a sacrifice during Assassin's summoning, but was saved when Assassin herself chose her as her Master.
She is not a magus, but she decides to participate in the Great Holy Grail War for the sake of Assassin who desires the Holy Grail.

Lancer of "Red"

“赤”のランサー

Height/Weight:178cm/65kg
Blood type:unknown
Birthday:unknown

The Heroic Spirit of the lance contracted with a magus hired by the Mage's Association.
A powerful and mighty Heroic Spirit who carries golden armor that shines like the sun and a lance that can kill even gods.
He dispassionately accomplishes his mission without raising a single objection to his Master.

Archer of "Red"

“赤”のアーチャー

Height/Weight:166cm/57kg
Blood type:unknown
Birthday:unknown
Measurements:B78 W59 H75

The Heroic Spirit of the bow contracted with a magus hired by the Mage's Association. She is cool-headed and uses a somewhat antiquated way of speaking.
A hunter who prioritizes her wild instinct over her pride as a Heroic Spirit.
Her main weapon is a bow that has received the blessings of a goddess.

Berserker of "Red"

"赤"のバーサーカー

Height/Weight:221cm/165kg
Blood type:unknown
Birthday:unknown

The mad warrior Heroic Spirit contracted with a magus hired by the Mage's Association. He has the capability to converse with others which is unusual for the Berserker class, but that does not mean that his Mad Enhancement rank is low, as he is absolutely incapable of establishing mutual understand with others. He doesn't obey almost all orders, and only takes joy in defeating the strong.

Rider of "Red"

"赤"のライダー

Height/Weight:185cm/97kg
Blood type:unknown
Birthday:unknown

The mounted soldier Heroic Spirit contracted with a magus hired by the Mage's Association. A handsome young man. He is a free and easy-going person, and he does not obey unjust orders even from his Master.
He boasts of a strength that rivals that of Lancer of "Red", and he is overwhelming with his abundance of powerful Noble Phantasms.
He is the greatest hero in this Great Holy Grail War.

Saber of "Red"

"赤"のセイバー

Height/Weight:154cm/42kg
Blood type:unknown
Birthday:unknown
Measurements:B73 W53 H76

The Heroic Spirit of the sword contracted with Kairi Sisigou. A knight overflowing with arrogance and excessive self-confidence. In order to conceal her stats, she hides her face with her Noble Phantasm armor during battle.

Caster of "Red"

"赤"のキャスター

Height/Weight:180cm/75kg
Blood type:unknown
Birthday:unknown

The magus Heroic Spirit contracted with a magus hired by the Mage's Association. Though he is a Caster, he can use almost no magecraft.
His objective in life is to spin a magnificent story, and he plays a central role in supporting the Masters on the battlefield.
He immerses himself in self-satisfaction by often using quotes suitable to the occasion from his own works.

It was going to be completely different from the skirmishes until now. Now there was a battlefield, soldiers, weapons, commanders, a territory that needed to be captured, and most of all, a [king] that needed to be slain.

"Those are savages. Fools who dirty my dominion and laugh crudely in arrogance can only die. Kill them while laughing. We must thoroughly re-educate those who lack the knowledge of fear with an ox-hide whip."

Stifling her anguish and simply looking forward—Ruler simply endured the explosive maelstrom of light.

Fate/Apocrypha

Volume 02

By : Higashide Yuuichirou

Illustrated By : Konoe Ototsugu

Prologue

There was once a hero. A great hero who killed a dragon.

A prince of the Netherlands, he was brave and noble, and everyone praised his majestic appearance and extoled his glory.

All men hastened to become his subordinates, and all women pushed their earnest affections onto him.

The hero also lived up to their expectations.

With rarely any time for rest, he only sought battle. No, it wasn't that he sought battle, but rather, battle would never let him and his great power escape.

His famous sword Balmung, which he received from the tribe of the fog, the Nibelung. His body of steel, which was bathed in the blood of the evil dragon Fafnir, whom he slayed.

An invincible sword and an invincible body. It was only logical that many battles sought him out. Untouched until his death, his life was simply dazzling.

But he was a hero—*too much so*. When someone made a request of him, he answered it. When someone kneeled before him and begged his help, he firmly grasped their proffered hand.

When asked to slay a dragon, he slayed it. When asked for help in sleeping with a peerless beautiful maiden whom none could satisfy, he wracked his brains over a way to do so. His actions were neither good nor bad. His way of life was just like that of a wish-granting machine. He thought that it was fine that way. After all, good and evil was merely a matter of where you stood.

When officials who took advantage of their position complained that their families had been killed, he took revenge for them.

Since people suffering in poverty simply didn't wish for anything, he abandoned them.

Because if he didn't do so, it would never end. It's impossible to carry everything in the world in a single person's arms. So he decided to only respond to requests that were asked of him.

He did not act according to his own will. He did not fight because he liked it. As he was doing so, the hero suddenly realized. He did not know what he himself wished for at all. He had no wishes or dreams. He couldn't even imagine the future. Even though there were those who called the hero an ideal being, the hero in question had lost sight of his own ideal.

—What a fraud. The gears did not mesh at all. If he responded to any and all requests, it was only natural that he would end up not knowing what he himself wanted.

He had lost sight of his path and wandered aimlessly, but even so—he believed that there lay something at the end. He believed that there lay something at the end of this way of life. The hero could only continue to fight.

He was never defeated. Such a thing was impossible. As long as others requested victory of him, he grasped victory no matter much suffering and despair he trod on.

Victory, victory, he only knew victory. "Please kill that monster", "Please save our village", "Please defeat our enemies", "Please get me that mountain", "Please get me that beautiful maiden", "Please get me that country"—the number of wishes equaled the number of people, and the amount of those he granted equaled the amount of those that were requested of him.

He was already a mere [System]—a [Holy Grail] that bore the name 'hero'.

Even so, it's fine, the hero thought.

After all, being thanked by someone was not a bad feeling.

It was only natural that his heart would be moved when people requested his help with desperate expressions.

So he continued without faltering—and in the end, he even managed to slay a dragon. But there was a hole somewhere in his heart. There was nothing at the bottom of the hole, merely an empty black space within him.

Even though he loved humans.

Even though he loved the world.

He never managed to fill that emptiness no matter what he did.

The hero's name was—

Chapter 1

Staggering, he tried to stand up, and his hand touched the surface of cool and rough rock. Before he could ask himself where he was, he sensed the presence of something in front of him and felt himself gripped by a chill.

Something was breathing nearby. But why were those breaths showering his entire body?

…It was because the [something] that appeared to be in front of him was absurdly huge. Filled with rage and wickedness, it was lying in wait to eat him.

His own breathing became erratic. He wanted to run away, immediately run away at fully speed; he had to run away, run away, run away. However, his body couldn't move, as if it were tied down to his shadow. Cold and unpleasant drops of sweat dripped down his entire body like slugs.

—Cold.

His heart was frozen in fear. And yet, heat shook throughout his body. Did that mean that the thing right in front of him was something more ferocious than any kind of flame?

The air he inhaled was like poison, and exhaling it was accompanied by pain. However, the thing in front of him never tried to lay a hand on him.

Without appearing or calling out, the thing sluggishly turned in another direction. It was neither running away nor leaving. It had simply drawn its huge body back inside.

There was only one sentence that the thing communicated to him.

Don't forget. Those words engraved themselves on his skin like a tattoo.

—This is neither a dream nor reality. This is the threshold world on the border between dreams and reality.

Never forget this thing, for you will meet it again soon.

Thus, with a pain in his chest that felt as if needles had been stabbed into him, and with the feeling of his blood burning as if on fire—he awoke.

***

Frozen air, frozen silence. The forest was simply dark and silent. Rider of Black, Astolfo, who had been emotionally sobbing just earlier, finally stood up.

He pulled up the fallen homunculus. His stature, which should have been slightly smaller or about the same as Rider's, had grown considerably. It appeared that, due to taking in the heart of Saber of Black—of Siegfried, his body had undergone a radical transformation.

Still unable to believe it, the homunculus clenched and unclenched his hands again and again. The dull pain he felt when his heart was ruptured still remained, but it had already been reduced to a level that wouldn't impeded him.

"It seems that Saber's heart is functioning properly."

Rider nodded, appearing impressed. The homunculus put his hand against his heart, and indeed felt a strong pulse from it. Blood so hot that it made him sweat flowed throughout his entire body.

"Yeah—"

The homunculus felt slightly moved as he spoke without experiencing pain. To think that inhaling and exhaling could be so comfortable!

Somewhat excited, he surveyed his surroundings until his attention was caught by a tree.

The homunculus adjusted his breathing and activated his Magic Circuits. He gently placed his hands on the tree, confirmed the tree's material properties, and then released his prana to destroy it. The tree easily broke like a twig, but the homunculus' body magnificently endured the force of operating his Magic Circuits.

Watching him, Rider nodded in a somewhat lonely manner.

"…Yeah. Like this, you'll probably be okay by yourself from here on. Since Saber died, someone has to go back and explain what happened right away, or things will become complicated."

Rider was correct. The Masters at the Fortress of Millennia were probably confirming the status of all the Servants one by one. Saber had been sent to chase after Rider and the homunculus, so there was a high chance that a new pursuer would be sent at this rate.

"I have to take back this guy too."

He lightly tapped the head of Saber's Master… Gordes Musik Yggdmillennia, who was unconscious after having been struck by Saber. The man's physique normally wouldn't make carrying him a feasible feat, but Rider was a Heroic Spirit. Carrying the man on his shoulder was no problem for him.

"Oh, that's right. We don't know what you might encounter along the way, so I'll give you this sword."

Rider casually handed over the slender sword hanging along his waist. Bewildered, the homunculus accepted it. Though it was slender, the steel blade felt heavy in his hands.

"But, this is yours—"

"Yeah, but I have my lance and book besides my sword. And that's not even including my hippogriff as well. Honestly, I don't use my sword that much."

Rider gave a full-blown smile and a peace sign with his fingers—unable to see a reason to refuse, the homunculus hung the sword along his waist.

He was a bit worried about his balance due to the added weight on one side of his body, but he would probably get used to it before long.

"…I want you to use it with great care. It seems I misunderstood Saber. Umm, how to put it…? I mistakenly thought he was a sullen, straight-laced, and boring guy."

"I get it. Thank you. I was truly saved by you."

"It's fine, it's fine. I wasn't very useful in the end."

That's not true, thought the homunculus. Rider alone had answered his cries for help. He had held out his hand to him, saying he would help him. The homunculus had nothing to repay him with, and yet Rider had unhesitantly done something that would not recompense him in any way… Perhaps it was precisely because he was such a man that his words had convinced Saber to save the homunculus at the last moment.

"By the way, I've wanted to ask you before. —What's your name?"

"…My name?"

How difficult, thought the homunculus as he folded his arms. Naturally, if he had been specially made to serve as a maid or to fight, he would have been given a name to discern him from other homunculi, but since he was just a mass-produced industrial product, there had been no need to give him a name.

That's why he had to think of a name for himself now. There was no way he could live his entire life under the name 'homunculus'.

Suddenly, he touched his hand to his heart. This was a blessed gift from a Heroic Spirit. So, at the very least—

"How about 'Sieg'?"

"Not Siegfried?"

"…It would be far too brazen for me to completely copy his name. But, it would be regrettable to completely forget it as well. So, I thought 'Sieg' would do."

Rider nodded his head enthusiastically.

"That's true… Yeah, Sieg is a nice name, isn't it?"

"Thank you. Then, my name is Sieg."

"Ahaha. Nice to meet you, Sieg!"

Rider offered his hand, and, with some hesitation, Sieg grabbed it with his own. They both knew that their final farewell was approaching soon.

"Isn't there something I can do for you?"

Rider made a somewhat painful expression and slowly shook his head.

"—There isn't. You have been freed from this war. You're a free man now. And most likely, your life span has been increased to that of an ordinary person, I think? So you should live normally and die normally. If you do that, the one who saved you, Saber, will probably be happy as well."

With a kind gesture like that of a young maiden, Rider placed his hand on Sieg's cheek and smiled. Then, as if overcome with emotion, he pulled Sieg's head close and ruffled his hair.

After doing that for a while, Rider finally released him.

"All right, get going now. I'll manage somehow or other on my side."

Nodding at Rider's words that seemed to thrust him away slightly, Sieg drew back first one, then two steps. It was slow, but he was certainly increasing the distance between them. Rider waved his hand reluctantly as they parted, but eventually he nodded as if severing himself from something, and then he suddenly hoisted up Gordes over his shoulder and turned his back to Sieg.

"Rider! What should I do?"

Sieg called out to his back as he began to leave. Rider turned his head around and shouted back to him with a full-blown smile on his face.

"Anything is fine! You're able to do anything now! Go to a town, meet people, come to like and dislike others, and live a happy life!"

I see. Indeed, that is probably happiness, agreed Sieg mentally… Somewhere in his heart, he felt a sense of unease like a thin, clinging membrane, but he did his best to avert his eyes from that.

Rider breathed a sigh of satisfaction.

Yeah, that homunculus was no longer someone that needed to be protected. With his strong body and first-rate Magic Circuits, it shouldn't be impossible for him to quietly slip into the world and keep on living.

Of course, Yggdmillennia's reparations were considerably large. Losing Saber, the self-proclaimed strongest swordsman in the Great Holy Grail War, was especially fatal.

The Black Faction had also managed to defeat Berserker of Red, Spartacus, and had placed him under their control as a pawn. But the respective value of Saber and Berserker was not comparable by any means.

"…Well, it's fine. What will be, will be."

With that, Rider stopped thinking about the course of the Great Holy Grail War. For the time being, he would simply dance through the skies and fight. Of course, he had to wrack his brains over how to explain the matter of Saber—but he was bad at lying, and he didn't think he'd done anything wrong either.

True, Saber of Black, Siegfried, had given his heart to the homunculus and died as a result. This might have been a fatal act for them in the Great Holy Grail War. But so what? In the end, Saber, who had been given a second life, *did what he wanted to do*. It was definitely not something he'd been forced to do, but rather an act of selflessness—of justice.

He would honestly and frankly confess with pride in his chest that Saber had done the right thing.

That was what Rider decided.

Thus, Sieg slowly began walking. His legs stepped forward strongly and made light footprints on the frozen ground. But even so, his progress was slow. With each step he took, he would turn around and watch Rider's increasingly distant figure.

Rider still hadn't killed the living Gordes. He was a Master and had Command Spells remaining, so it was possible for him to make a contract with a new Servant.

The problem was that Rider might be punished. He didn't know anything besides the knowledge that he had possessed from birth regarding the Great Holy Grail War. But he knew enough to understand that the Saber class was famed for being the strongest among all Servant classes.

That Saber had died. Moreover, it had been due to giving his heart to Sieg. This was an act that could rightfully be called equivalent to suicide. That was an unmistakeable truth even for Servants. Even though he had been given a second life like this, why had he done such a thing?

…Sieg didn't know what he wished for. Sieg was neither his comrade nor friend. They weren't even acquaintances. Though in a sense, they might share the common feature of possessing lives that were meant to be consumed like wood chips.

Even so, Sieg had been saved by him. Overflowing with feelings of endless gratitude, he did not know how to repay this debt.

Now then. For the time being, he would head to a town just like Rider said. That being said, though, there was no way he could slip into Trifas. That town was Yggdmillennia's territory. So he would walk straight through this place and go to a nearby village.

…He had to go, but.

Quite strangely, in spite of the fact that Rider had already disappeared from sight, his progress was slow as his feet still tended to stop.

"Hmm, I wonder why?"

For some reason, he whispered to himself—and his throat didn't hurt from doing so, which made him a little happy. As a homunculus, there was nothing he didn't know about himself. At the very least, he should know about any abnormalities (errors) in his body.

It wasn't that he was injured. His physical condition was at its highest within his short life. There was heat in his body and his heartbeat was strong. There were no errors in his feet at all. His brain—no errors. His nerves—no damage. Illness due to a virus—none.

Everything was normal. And his objective was to first [go to a town] because he had to secure a base besides that of Trifas. He estimated the possibility of his success to be a bit more than 80%. If he was unlucky, he might get caught by Yggdmillennia by coincidence and then would probably return to a tragic fate.

He had an objective and his physical condition was normal, so there was no reason for his feet not to move. And yet, they wouldn't move.

"I should have asked Rider for a method to make my feet move…"

And suddenly, at this late hour.

The homunculus realized he was alone once more. And that he would never again meet Rider.

"…Hmm."

It hurts, he thought as he felt his chest tighten a little. Trying to ignore it as much as possible, he somehow managed to continue walking.

***

To explain starting from the conclusion, Rider of Black, Astolfo, currently had stakes driven into both his arms and legs, had his movements confined by fluid-form golems and was in fact imprisoned along with Berserker of Red.

He had spoken too honestly, and to make it worse had added in his own thoughts ("It was really quite refreshing!") into his report. That Lancer of Black—Vlad III—would become enraged was only to be expected.

All the Masters, who learned Saber of Black's true name, had also looked at Rider of Black with reproach. After all, it was Siegfried, the 'dragonslayer' of the Netherlands. To the Black Faction, he was certainly a Servant that could serve as their trump card.

Lancer had ordered that Rider be imprisoned and then immediately vanished into spiritual form. His Master Darnic was smoothing things over with him, but he was currently in an ill mood. If this were back when he was still alive, someone's life would certainly have been a necessary price to improve his mood.

After expelling everyone else out from the dungeon, Rider's Master Celenike slapped his face. Annoyingly to her, the sound it made was very light. Although Rider wore a solemn expression, he showed no signs of reacting to the pain—and most of all, no signs of despairs.

"Do you understand just what you did?"

"I understand, you know? I saved a homunculus… That's all."

"Don't joke around! Saber has disappeared, don't you get it!? Saber, the strongest of all Servants! And it wasn't in battle. He didn't even die in battle! He disappeared due to an internal dispute, how ridiculous! And it's your fault!"

Rider thought it over for a short while, and while knowing his next words might anger her, he whispered.

"No. It's not my responsibility. Saber splendidly acted according to his own will, just like a hero should."

Celenike slapped Rider's face again. Even so, he remained calm and composed, which exasperated her irritation more and more, so she gripped the stakes stabbed into his hands and legs and shook them.

"Ow, ooooooww! No, c-come on, give me a break!"

She felt satisfied as Rider finally showed an anguished face. It was an expression that she hadn't been able to see no matter what she did to him on top of the bed.

—This alone is wonderful, and yet…

Celenike thought so from the bottom of her heart. It was truly regrettable that Servants didn't possess a physical body made of flesh.

"If you had held back at my side like a Servant should, you wouldn't be in this kind of position."

"Ah, if I start doing that from now on, will you take these things out?"

Celenike, as expected, shook her head at that proposal. At the very least, Lancer of Black would not allow it. She had no intention of getting dragged into it.

"—These will only be taken out when you fight. It's been decided that you will be completely treated as a *pawn* in this Great Holy Grail War."

Celenike gave a cruel smile and put her mouth to his ear as she spoke.

"If you're going to blame someone, blame that homunculus."

Watching Celenike leave after saying that, Rider tilted his head with an idle expression.

"…Why?"

Celenike considered Servants as being the same as *normal* humans too much. After all, Rider couldn't understand at all her words about hating the homunculus. He understood it even less than the reason for why Lancer of Black had driven stakes into his limbs and the abuse he had received from his Master.

Crossing paths with Celenike as she left, Archer of Black—Chiron—also came to visit Rider in the dungeon. He hadn't said a single word when Rider had been brought before all the other Servants and Masters.

"—If I had at least intervened, it wouldn't have come to this."

This was true. Lancer highly valued Archer's strategic experience, and he was widely trusted due to his honest and upright character. If he had spoken out and stood up for Rider, there was a high chance that the matter would have been settled with just a rebuke.

But Rider immediately had stopped him from doing so with a brief glance at the start.

"No, no. There's no reason to split apart our faction due to a trivial thing like this. In this incident, I was scolded and received punishment. If that's enough to end the matter, I don't mind it at all."

Rider understood why he was being punished. Regardless of whether what he did was right or not, it didn't change the fact that Saber had died in the end. So the king, Lancer, thought it was necessary for someone to be punished. And since Saber was gone, Rider was the only one who could be punished now.

Even if it was unreasonable and he knew that his actions hadn't been wrong, Rider did not refuse the punishment. He had decided that upon finally reaching here.

—In the first place, this wasn't his first time being locked up and imprisoned. He had a similar experience when he was trapped in the form of a tree by a certain witch.

"However…"

The only thing that Rider worried about was that, if it came to light that Archer had also been involved with freeing the homunculus, Lancer might alienate Archer.

It would be troubling if their king and their strategist quarreled while they fought in the war from now on. If the issue was resolved with punishing a single reckless knight, the war front wouldn't collapse completely.

"It's fine this way. And in the first place, losing Saber doesn't mean that we've lost yet. Right?"

Rider grinned fearlessly.

"—Yes, that's right."

It was true that they had lost Saber. But, as long as Archer could devise a strategy, it didn't mean that their side's advantage had been completely undermined. If they threw Berserker of Red, Spartacus, onto the battlefield, it would certainly deal enormous damage to the enemy. It may have been completely by chance, but the strategy of capturing him had been the very best plan in that situation. If they had tried destroyed him without proper handling, they might have sustained far more large-scale damage.

However, it was certain that great care would have to be taken in handling Berserker of Red.

"…Even so, I never thought Saber would do such a thing."

"Yeah, me too. Yeah, maybe I should have talked to him more. I regret not doing so now."

"That would have been difficult since his Master Gordes forbade him from talking."

"Ah…"

Saber's greatest misfortune was probably having that guy of all the magi among the Yggdmillennia as his Master. It was extremely unlucky for that rare hero to serve under such a coward… err, cautious Master, thought Rider with a sigh.

"In any case, did he make it out safe and sound?"

"Yeah. Maybe it's due to taking in Saber's heart? His height and features became quite splendid and heroic too. If he's like that, he'll be fine. By my diagnosis, he'll live for a hundred years."

"Hoh," said Archer as he showed a rare display of surprise.

"I heard that Saber… Siegfried gained a steel body due to being bathed in the blood of a dragon, and that the blood circulated through his body due to swallowing it. The heart is an internal organ that sends blood through the body, so the blood of a dragon might have been mixed in with it as a result."

"It must be nice, being a dragonslayer. I also want the title of dragonslayer!"

"—At any rate. If it's him, he should be able to make a compromise with the world and live successfully."

Archer and Rider felt no unease in that regard. Among the many homunculi within this fortress, he was the only one that had boldly shown his own desire to 'live'.

No matter what difficult circumstances he came to face, he'd probably live bravely.

"Even so. Why did you go that far to help him, Archer?"

"We are, after all, transient ghosts without flesh. It would be nice if—there was even a single being that we etched into this world, don't you think?"

There was only gentleness in Archer's voice.

"I think that you should have been the one to become our king."

Rider whispered something so dangerous that Lancer would have had to kill him if he heard it. Archer shook his head with a bitter smile.

"I'm not good at bearing the full brunt of responsibility."

Rider sighed at those words and lamented, "This isn't going to go well."

***

It was a good thing he had time to spare. Sieg thought that while walking. It had been difficult to even vaguely think of something while walking with a body that previously would become exhausted and feel pain just by taking steps.

Since the Bounded Field was functioning, the forest remained silent as usual. There were no signs of any living creatures. He'd already gained considerable distance from the fortress. Even if the Yggdmillennia knew vaguely where he was within the Boundary Field, they wouldn't go to the extent of expressly chasing after him.

When he had nearly climbed halfway up the mountain, the light voices of birds started to leak out. That meant the Bounded Field that drove away living creatures didn't function here. It was still gloomy due to the large trees clustered around each other, but it appeared that dawn would arrive soon. Through that, he calculated that he'd been walking for several hours, but his body still showed no signs of being tired. Even though his clothing was too thin and sparse for mountain climbing in the late fall, he didn't even feel chilly.

Even if he had become healthier now, this was still a bit abnormal. Sieg conjectured that it was most likely due to the power of Saber of Black, Siegfried's heart.

…He wanted more concerns to think about, so that he could surrender his mind to complicated and mysterious equations. If he did that, he could escape, even if only slightly, the unidentified haze that had been coiling through his mind since earlier which still hadn't gone away.

His progress was still slow, but even so—as he kept going forward, a road appeared before he had noticed it.

Crossing over the mountain, Sieg sighted a village too small to be called a town far below. Unlike Trifas, the influence of the Yggdmillennia magi shouldn't reach here.

It probably wouldn't even take him a day to take control of the villagers' minds through suggestion. In other words, he could obtain a peaceful and ordinary life in that village. Or he could also use it as a stepping stone to go to another town or even another country.

So if he took this single step forward, that life would begin the moment he did so. He would be able to live, obtain something, or find a wish for himself.

Being able to live such a life was called—[freedom].

It was wonderful. It was full of good things. No matter what may happen, there was nothing as bad as his previous life, and if he could change things for the better, he just needed to take this first step forward.

For the sake of this single step, a hero had given him his life. Another hero had healed him. And another hero still had walked alongside him.

It was all for the sake of this single step.

But why? Why did his feet refuse to take that step forward?

He sighed. He couldn't seem to shake off the haze in his mind. Did living as a human being mean that this haziness would accompany him for his entire life?

Regardless, he somehow managed to raise his foot forward and—

"Stop!"

He frantically looked over his shoulder in response to the voice that restrained him, which was followed by a noise. The noise just now was definitely not natural. It was the sound of something heavy falling down.

Was it a pursuer? But there was no sign of magecraft being used, and he didn't sense the enormous prana of a Servant. Although he hesitated slightly, Sieg decided that it should be fine to at least see the owner of the voice, and so he turned back.

He broke off a bit from the mountain path and pushed through the forest. *I think the sound came from around here,* he thought as he looked around—and found it.

In that instant, his soul was snatched away.

"____"

He couldn't even let out a sigh of wonder. He just looked at the girl who was leaning her body against a tall tree as she crouched in exhaustion.

Illuminated by the faint light of daybreak that leaked through the gaps between the trees, her slightly swaying hair shone like golden silk threads. Her amethyst-colored eyes were completely pure as they looked at him, rousing an unnecessary feeling of guilt in Sieg.

She didn't have the precise and molded beauty of a homunculus, or the kind of cuteness that made one's heart flutter just by being nearby like Rider. She possessed a wondrous beauty that scarcely felt real.

The girl's body was clad in armor—she was unmistakably a Servant. Regardless of whether she was with the Black or Red faction, she ought to be someone that he shouldn't become involved with.

If asked whether she was an enemy or an ally, he would definitely conclude that she was an enemy. And yet, the thought of getting away from her was far from his mind.

Was it like having one's eyes enraptured by a work of art? Without realizing it, Sieg had stepped over to the girl's side. The instant he tried to touch his hand to the girl's cheek as she leaned over, the sword hanging on his waist made a clinking sound as if to warn him.

They both remained silent. Meeting her gaze, Sieg's mind was in chaos. Now that he thought about it properly, what had he been about to do?

Extending his hand to touch a girl crouching down was an extremely vulgar act. Just as he was about to hurriedly pull back his hand, the girl suddenly grasped his hand with her own.

"Thank goodness… I managed to meet you!"

The instant the girl smiled and said that, Sieg thought to himself: Even if this girl was his enemy—or even if she cut off his head right here. Just being able to have seen that smiling face left him with no regrets.

***

The holy maiden who had been summoned in this Great Holy Grail War as Ruler: Jeanne d'Arc. She carefully inspected the parts of the forest that had been the stage for two fights, the battle between Berserker of Red and Lancer and Rider of Black and the battle between Rider and Archer of Red and Saber, Berserker, and Archer of Black, and placed a hand to her chest in relief.

The destruction had been limited to trees mowed down in the midst of battle. Furthermore, the range of destruction through the forest wasn't extensive. If Lancer of Red—the great hero Karna, who was clad in the sun itself—had participated, the forest might have been turned into scorched earth.

Leaving aside the Masters of Black faction who were secluding themselves in the Fortress of Millennia, she hadn't caught any sight of the Masters of the Red faction who should have initiated the attack. But it wasn't that strange if she considered it from the viewpoint that this war was just starting to unfold. Masters in the Holy Grail War mainly consisted of magi, so they likely wouldn't be experienced with battle itself.

"…In any case, it was a normal battle."

Yes. Though the number of Servants was large, the battle was conducted normally. Archer who sniped from long range, Berserker who charged forward, Caster who controlled golems through magecraft, Lancer who summoned stakes and skewered the enemy—including Rider and Saber

as well, none of them were absurd Servants who slipped from the limitations of Heroic Spirits. That went for both the Black and Red Servants.

…Of course, since they were Servants, their power was tremendous. Rider of Red especially stood out among them. By Ruler's estimation, he boasted ability and power that rivaled Lancer of Red's.

That was understandable. After all, he was a great and famous hero. The progress of a battle completely changed just due to his existence. Should Rider and Lancer both be present on the battlefield, the Red side would be superior in terms of the [quality] of Servants.

Naturally, that was only a comparison in simple power. The affinities between Servants, the abilities of their Noble Phantasms, magecraft, location; there were countless factors to consider. Depending on what kind of Servants the still unseen Assassin of Black, Saber of Red, Caster of Red and Assassin of Red were, the situation could change further still…

At any rate, the situation was fixed to the limits of a normal Holy Grail War. Even if it dissolved into an all-out battle between all fourteen Servants, the town of Trifas was isolated from the outside with its population of twenty thousand. If she used her privilege as Ruler, she could also likely limit any damage done to the minimum.

There weren't any suspicious factors. There weren't any, but—

Nonetheless, a sense of doubt whose source she just couldn't grasp whirled within her heart. She had held out through the night like this and investigated the traces from the battles, but in the end she hadn't obtained any clues. The only clue that she obtained was the fact that Lancer of Red had come to take her out. Ruler also understood quite well that Lancer of Red possessed a pure and noble character. As such, it was probably due to the order of his Master that he had tried to kill her.

…As expected, she needed to make contact with the Masters of the Red Faction somehow.

In any case, tonight's battle was over now… The moment she thought that, her body lost a little strength… It appeared that she was 'sleepy'. To put it more accurately, it wasn't Ruler, Jeanne, who was sleepy. The one who required sleep was, in the end, only Laeticia's body. However, in the first place, Servants lacked the ability to sleep. Perhaps due to that gap, it was somehow a refreshing urge for her.

"Ugh, no… not yet…"

This sleepiness was not something that Jeanne could deal with just through willpower. She had to return to the town and make it all the way to the church and the bed in the attic there. But her body was rapidly wishing for sleep too much.

She leaned her hand against the trunk of a large tree, and when that turned out to be not enough, she reluctantly punched her cheek. The pain managed to clear her mind… A physical body was

truly inconvenient. Due to her incomplete summoning, she could endure it for long periods of time, but if she crossed over the limit, she would probably lose consciousness like a switch being cut.

Leaving the matter of finding a way to deal with this problem for the future, for now she used the holy water she carried and once more began identifying the location of each Servant. If she found no problems, she would end her work here for tonight.

Five of the Black Servants and one of the Red Servants were located in the fortress. The Red Servant should be Berserker. It had been a large capture operation, but it appeared he had succeeded in safely changing Masters. This was not a violation of the rules, as changing to different Masters or Servants was a natural occurrence—no, wait.

"There's one missing…?"

There should have been six Black Servants in the fortress. What had happened to the last one? She expanded her search range further and further, but she couldn't find the sixth one.

…She had a bad premonition. That Servant had died—was not what had happened. If one of the fourteen Servants lost, Ruler would definitely be able to sense it intuitively. At present, no Servants had been defeated.

But something was strange. It wasn't her intuition as the Servant Ruler, but her instincts as Jeanne d'Arc that whispered to her that something had occurred somewhere without her knowledge.

She had to locate the last Servant as quickly as possible. But how to search? Should she go out and search aimlessly?

She wouldn't find anything that way. Ruler felt certain of that. God helps those who help themselves, so searching blindly would merely be acting without thinking.

In that case—she looked at the fortress where the other five Servants were gathered. Questioning them would be more constructive.

At the very least, the Black faction had to bring her over to their side, so they probably would not try to kill her without even attempting to talk like the Red faction.

It might be wishful thinking, but nothing would start if she didn't act. Ruler decided to proceed squarely towards the fortress right to the front door.

The fortress towered on top of a slightly elevated hill that lorded over Trifas. Its silhouette faintly stood out against the black of night, reminiscent of a huge kettle in hell within which squirmed the souls of the departed. Its majesty was far too mismatched with the small town with a

population of twenty thousand, but the inhabitants of the town didn't even consider using it as a sightseeing landmark. One reason was that this fortress was not a public building, but rather a private building built on private property… but most of all, it was because all the inhabitants of the town were afraid of this fortress.

It wasn't that they thought it was cursed. The ones who ruled Trifas lived in this castle. The inhabitants generally perceived it that way, and in reality, that assumption was correct.

Standing before the castle gate, Ruler twisted her head to look up. The fortress possessed not even a fragment of artistry, and its stubborn structure made it in effect difficult to assault and easy to defend. However, that was not the true special characteristic of this fortress.

She softly touched the castle wall. Instantly, a slight numbness ran through her. It was probably a spell that contained both strong interference and detection magecraft. Due to the countless magical defences that covered the surface of the wall, even a Servant would probably require a suitable destructive force to make this fortress fall.

When Ruler stood before the castle gate, the gate started automatically opening before she had even named herself. The door opened with a trembled, and on the other side of it stood a single 'old person' with a staff in his hand.

"You are a magus of Yggdmillennia, correct? I am—"

"The mediator of this Great Holy Grail War, Jeanne d'Arc-sama. It is truly the highest honor to meet the famous holy maiden. My name is Darnic Prestone Yggdmillennia. I serve as the chief of the magi that reside in the Fortress of Millennia."

Forestalling her introduction, Darnic gave an exaggerated bow. His use of her true name was probably a warning rather than an attempt to show familiarity. But then, the fact that her true name was known to others didn't matter to her. Rather, if she didn't disclose her true name, it would probably be difficult for every Master and Servant to place trust in her. That was why she had given her name as Jeanne at the church.

"…I'll say this just in case, but I have no intention to support either the Black or Red factions in the Great Holy Grail War. I have only come here because there are two or three things I wish to ask you about."

Darnic responded to Jeanne's words of indifference without losing his smile.

"Naturally, I am aware of this. However, for the time being, please come meet my lord first. He's been in a good mood since we received the report that you came."

"Lord…?"

Darnic nodded and spoke with a smile that gripped Ruler with wariness.

"The sovereign of Wallachia, Vlad III, is my Servant, Lancer of Black."

As Ruler walked through a stone-paved hallway with Darnic leading the way, servants came and went in either direction and bowed to them one by one as they passed. Ruler realized they were homunculi from their excessively uniform looks, behavior and Magic Circuits within their bodies.

"We thought it was best to keep the number of humans involved down to the absolute minimum."

Darnic murmured those words as they walked. This followed the fundamental rule of the Holy Grail War to avoid involving unrelated humans as much as possible. But—

"Homunculi are also unrelated lives no different from anyone else."

Ruler curtly replied.

By its nature, the Holy Grail War was both the smallest and greatest war in the world. Seven Masters and seven Servants should have been sufficient for it to be conducted… Though this time, the circumstances differed far too much.

"Hoh. So as a saint, you also work your hardest for artificial life forms. Then have we violated your rules?"

Darnic gave her a sarcastic smile, and Ruler's expression stiffened slightly as she responded.

"—I won't go as far as to say that."

…But, considering the current scale of battle, it could be argued that employing homunculi like this couldn't be helped. It was true that there was no room for Ruler to judge it as a violation of the rules. She couldn't force them, and it was difficult to call the homunculi children. They had merely been created that way.

"Unlike our enemy, the Association of Magi, the existence of our clan hangs in the balance. I would appreciate it if you would take that point into account."

The door connecting to the throne room opened.

"Guh."

Although Ruler leaked out that faint mutter, she stepped into the throne room without hesitation. Sitting on the throne was Lancer of Black—Vlad III. And from among the Black Servants who followed him, Archer, Berserker and Caster stood in reserve nearby.

Furthermore, golems and homunculi carrying halberds were also lined up in the room with them.

…Their presence was miniscule as a threat, but even so, their combined hostility as a group created an intimidating air on its own. However, Ruler had experience with being surrounded on all sides by enemies during her lifetime.

Not especially worked up by it, Ruler calmly stepped forward to the king. Since she wasn't a retainer, she didn't bow her head, but the king didn't raise a single eyebrow at it.

"I am the Servant Ruler summoned as the mediator in this Great Holy Grail War, Jeanne d'Arc."

"—Hmm. It's reassuring to have a mediator who believes in the same God as I."

"…Since I believe in God, I pray that I can convey to you that I aim to be fair and impartial."

The edges of Lancer of Black's mouth loosened into a smile at Ruler's resolute gaze. He probably thought her words were the nonsense of a foolish country girl.

"Now then, dawn is almost upon us. First of all, what is your business here, mediator?"

"You battled against the Red Servants earlier this night, correct? The opponents should have been Rider, Archer and Berserker of Red."

"Yes, what of it?"

"In the end, it appears that the battle concluded with Rider and Archer withdrawing and Berserker being captured—but just what happened after that?"

"…"

Archer of Black reacted slightly to Ruler's question. No, it wasn't just him. A slight agitation was also visible among the halberd-wielding homunculi.

But the one who showed the most dramatic reaction was Lancer of Black.

"…How unpleasant."

Just by Lancer saying that, the throne room was filled with killing intent. It was unreasonable like a child's temper tantrum, but its power was equal to a wide-range, saturation-fire weapon. Ruler nonchalantly accepted the killing intent released by a weapon with its own will.

It wasn't as bad as the ill will she had received when she had sought an audience with the Crown Prince Charles at the Château de Chinon despite being a mere village girl, or when she was imprisoned and put on trial for heresy. If there was even the slightest uncertainty, it was that it was greater than when she had been executed.

"If you cannot provide an answer, it can't be helped. Our conversation ends here. I'll go and investigate it on my own."

The instant she was about to turn her back to him, Lancer's killing intent immediately softened.

"—Pardon me. It seems that I teased you a little too much."

Even Ruler couldn't help but be stunned that Lancer called the killing intent just now 'teasing'. No, perhaps he was telling the truth. To a king, all human emotions were a part of his rule. For example, he cried for his retainers even though he felt no sadness and he accepted tributes even though he felt no happiness from it. Perhaps anger was also just a mere performance for him.

"Saber committed suicide."

"Wha…"

Even Ruler was left speechless at those dispassionately spoken words. Lancer of Black shook his head and sighed as if sad.

She promptly stopped shut her mouth as she started to say, "That's impossi—". …It appeared that he was telling the truth when he said that Saber of Black, Siegfried, had lost his life. But there was a contradiction. Saber of Black was on the verge of death, but he was still alive.

…There was no way a Master wouldn't be able to sense the state his or her Servant. If that situation were to arise, it was probably because the Servant's karmic Line line had been severed.

But Ruler's perception ability exceeded that of the [spirit board]. True, it was feeble, but she could affirm that Saber of Black hadn't completely disconnected with this world. It was unclear where exactly he was, but—in any case, he should still be alive.

"Who would be able to explain the situation more concretely?"

"The one who reported it was Rider of Black, Astolfo… It appears that he instigated it, though, so he's been incarcerated in the dungeon as punishment."

"…Is that so?"

"—Now then. Ruler, I'll speak frankly. The swordsman who could truly be called a vital cornerstone for us has been meaninglessly lost. Therefore, I want to replenish my forces with a fighter of equal power as Saber. Is that not only natural?"

Ruler frowned as the conversation seemed to turn suspicious.

"As I said before, I am Ruler. I am this war's absolute mediator summoned by the Holy Grail… I have my own objective, and it does not involve joining you all."

"Do not you have a wish? Since you were summoned by the Holy Grail, you should have a wish of your own."

"—The Ruler class is an exception in this regard as well. Since Ruler is summoned as a mediator, possessing no wishes to be fulfilled in the present age is one of the qualifications for the class."

Those words caused a slight disturbance among the other Servants.

"…Ruler, you have no wish?"

"Yes, I have none."

Lancer struck his throne's armrest in irritation. Standing up, his former madness was unconcealed as he shouted angrily.

"Jeanne d'Arc. I know of your last moments! There is no way that you, who were betrayed by everyone, had everything taken away from you and met a violent death, do not have a wish! Answer me! I won't allow any falsehoods!"

If his previous killing intent was like a wide-range, saturation-fire weapon, his words this time were sharp like a stake. She could tell that the instant she lied or gave an answer Lancer could not accept, she would be skewered.

Ruler gazed at Lancer for a short while, and then spoke in a voice so calm it overpowered him.

"I have no wish. Everyone says that I should regret my last moments. That I probably wish for revenge, or wish to be saved. However—it's enough if I alone know the life that I lived. It's not that I don't have sympathy for others, but at the very least, I don't have even a single regret regarding my life, and I have no wish to make to the Holy Grail. If I were to have one, it would only be that this Holy Grail War be conducted correctly."

"You say that after having been forsaken even by God?"

"—That in itself is foolishness. The Lord did not forsake us. No, in the first place, the Lord has never forsaken a single person. There was just nothing he could do."

"What…?"

"Praying, giving offerings, everything is an act not for oneself, but for the Lord. We pray in order to heal the Lord's laments and sorrow. Yes, I definitely—"

I definitely heard the Lord's lament.

He shrieked. He lamented. He wept, and he felt sorrow.

The world changed straight into hell, and no one could stop it. No, perhaps that itself—was hell.

The Lord lamented in sorrow. People were not even allowed to live simply, and were compelled to become either beasts or food.

Conflict never ended, and blood continued to rain incessantly and soak the land.

That's why the Lord lamented—I heard His voice. I caught His small, feeble murmurs that everyone else failed to hear.

It was an obvious thing. To lend my ears to His voice and respond to it meant that I would throw away everything I had until now.

I had to throw away my life as a simple villager and the joy of loving someone and being loved back. Furthermore, there would be no compensation. I would surely be scorned by many people—both enemies and allies alike.

It was a very terrifying thing to contemplate. It was mad for a mere village girl from the countryside to leap onto the battlefield where people's killing intent swirled about.

—But the Lord cried.

Yes, I surely… can't bear it. I can't turn my back on His cries.

In order to stop the Lord's tears and soothe Him, I will oppose this world's hell. I will clad my body in armor, hang a sword on my waist, carry the flag—and devote my life to it.

Yes, the voice of revelation I received from the Lord contained no glory or victory, no obligation or sense of purpose. The Lord merely lamented and grieved.

—That's why. At the very least, having received that revelation, I thought I should stop the Lord's laments.

Lancer of Black glared fixedly at Ruler for a while, but eventually he shook his head and sat back down.

"—It seems that, even though we believe in the same God, we are incompatible."

"There are those who burned me at the stake even though they believed in the same God as me. So it's only natural."

Ruler spoke with a composed expression. Lancer of Black smiled pleasantly at those excessively joking words.

"…It can't be helped. But it's a fact that a Red Servant tried to kill you. We merely wish to win you over, but it seems they are different."

"So it seems. I also must investigate what the Red faction is thinking. I don't intend to oppose them but—"

"It's a different story if they attack you."

"…That's correct."

"I'll pray that the Red faction consists of fools aiming to kill you, then."

Lancer said that and smiled once more.

Ruler exited the throne room and headed directly for the dungeon. Both Berserker of Red who had been captured in battle and one of the Black Servants were present there. According to Lancer, it appeared to be Rider of Black.

The atmosphere within the dungeon made it obvious that it hadn't been used in a long time. Nearly all of the eight cells present were filled with nothing but rotted wood, straw and spider webs.

In one cell, Berserker of Red was imprisoned with his body completely sealed in a wax-like fluid. Even though he had changed Masters, that didn't mean that the Black side could simply leave him to take care of himself… Though even in this situation, his unchanging smile was very eerie.

Now then, the problem was the Servant who was imprisoned in the last remaining cell.

"—Oh? Who might you be?"

The young boy tilted his head with a puzzled expression. It was a casual gesture, but right now he was even more firmly sealed up than Berserker. The sight of him with stakes driven into his arms and legs was quite painful to look at.

"You are Rider of Black, correct? I am the Servant Ruler, Jeanne d'Arc. I was summoned by the Holy Grail to carry out the management of the Great Holy Grail War."

When Ruler told him that, Rider nodded with a "Yeah" in understanding.

"Now that you mention it, I did hear that such a Servant was summoned. But are you for real? You're not a Red Servant?"

When Rider gave her a doubtful look and a smile that said, *Things have gotten interesting*, Ruler took a short time to ponder, and then removed her gauntlet and rolled up her sleeve to show him 'that'.

"Woah…"

"Is this sufficient as proof?"

"…It is. Yeah, you're definitely Ruler. I see, so that's the 'privilege' of Ruler. How nice, I want it too!"

Rider nodded repeatedly in understanding.

"It's fortunate you understand. Now then, Rider. I apologize for this, but there's something I wish to question you about."

"Sure, sure. I'll answer anything as long as it's within my power, so go right ahead."

Rider replied in his unwavering light manner.

"…Did Saber of Black, Siegfried, really commit suicide?"

"Yeah, that's right."

…But that shouldn't be possible. Whether it was Saber or anyone else, all fourteen Servants were present in this world. She intuitively knew that he was 'alive'. Ruler knew this for certain. He still walked this earth.

"I'm sorry, could you please explain in a little more detail?"

"Sure. You came at just the right time. I can't stand all this free time."

Smiling, Rider started talking about Saber. It was far from a heroic tale, and more like the story of a saint. And he spoke of the homunculus, the nameless boy saved by that hero. He told of how the boy had sought freedom and departed.

"Well, after this and that, I ended up being tied up all by my lonesome in this place. No, I do have Berserker of Red as a neighbor, but talking doesn't work with him… You doing good over there?"

When Rider of Black called out, there was a response from the cell next door.

"I have no intention of flattering the dogs of political power. Though, I will answer your question. I'm doing fine. Now, it would be perfect if you could just remove these restraints—"

"That's for another time."

It was a startling development, but at the same time Ruler finally understood.

"…Saber has definitely disappeared. But he gave his [heart] to that homunculus."

It wasn't a mere sword or suit of armor assembled out of prana, or something small like a piece of hair. It was a heart, the internal organ that was just as important as the brain for humans. The spiritual core of Servants also existed in the heart and brain. Personally gouging out one's heart and giving it to another was an act without precedent in the past Holy Grail Wars.

Furthermore, the one who had given his heart was Saber of Black… in other words, the immortal hero Siegfried, who was bathed in the blood of a dragon and obtained a body close to that of the Dragon-kind. It wouldn't be strange if it had some kind of effect on the homunculus' body.

"Yeah. I parted with him there. After that, he headed towards the mountain road. I saw a village over there when I took my hippogriff out for a test ride, so I guess he'd be there now?"

"I see. I understand now. Thank you."

After Ruler gave her thanks, Rider of Black made a very complicated expression and asked a question of his own.

"…Are you going to meet him?"

"Yes. If what you say is correct, there is no one else but him who could be radiating the presence of a Servant."

"I know, but I'd like it if you didn't involve him in this war."

Rider, who had given an optimistic smile earlier, suddenly glared at Ruler with eyes that concealed a slight hostility and a strong determination. Ruler caught a glimpse of an extremely strong will within those eyes.

"…I understand. If what you say is correct, then he is certainly just a victim. As long as he doesn't wish otherwise, I do not intend to excessively interfere with him."

Rider sighed with relief, and his hostility vanished like mist all at once.

"I'm relieved to hear that. Yeah, if he can survive and live, ending up like this is worth it."

As Rider whispered that, Ruler asked Rider about one point that was still unclear.

"Rider. Why did Saber save that homunculus? If you were the one in Saber's position, I would understand. Since you're Astolfo, one of Twelve Paladins of Charlemagne—"

If the one who saved the homunculus was Astolfo, who sacrificed himself to chivalry and yet possessed a bottomless soft-hearted nature, it would be more understandable. But Saber of Black

was Siegfried. He was a member of royalty, a prince of the Netherlands. Protecting the lamenting weak and taking down the strong who lived in luxury was a suitable act for a Heroic Spirit. However, even that had a limit. Since he was a Servant summoned in the Holy Grail War, he should have had a wish to make upon the Holy Grail. At the very least, it was careless to go as far as to sacrifice his life to save a single person who wasn't even his Master.

To a Servant, participating in the Holy Grail War meant gaining a second life, a one-in-a-million miracle. It was not natural to so easily throw it away—and for a homunculus he didn't even know at that.

"Even if we're Servants, that doesn't mean we repeat the same things we did in life. Rather, there are a lot of guys who try to do something different in order to wipe away the regrets from when they were alive… Well, it probably ends in failure most of the time, though."

Heroes were heroes due to what they achieved in life. No one wished for what they couldn't accomplish in life.

"…Thank you for everything. I pray that you will be victorious in this war."

"Eh? Are you favoring me?"

Ruler chuckled and shook her head at his question.

"No. I merely pray for all the participants to be successful."

"Hey, hey, don't speak nonsense, Ruler. It's the principle of the Holy Grail War that there can only be one winner, you know?"

"That's correct. —Even so, I pray that everyone will be victorious."

Ruler quietly left the dungeon. Left alone once more, Rider of Black suddenly remembered Saber's last moments.

Had that man, who sacrificed himself to save the homunculus without hesitation and smiled in satisfaction at the end, been 'victorious'?

It would be nice if that were so—no, it had to be so. Rider thought that from the bottom of his heart.

The one that guided her out was not Darnic, but a female homunculus servant this time. Silently walking with quiet and precise steps, the homunculus truly did resemble a doll.

"Is it all right if I ask you something?"

The homunculus replied without stopping or nodding at Ruler's question.

"I don't mind. Please go ahead."

"Are you homunculi participating in the Great Holy Grail War because you wish so?"

"Of course. That is the wish of our master who created us, after all."

It was an indifferent and smooth answer. "I see," replied Ruler. …At the very least, it did not deviate from the rules of the Holy Grail War. It was by the will of both these homunculi and the golems that they acted to obey their master. Even if they were manufactured—it was still by their own will.

Therefore, she had to respect their wishes.

"I can make my way from here. Thank you very much."

When they finally arrived at the castle gate, Ruler politely stated her thanks. Gazing at her with transparent eyes, the homunculus bowed deeply. And the instant Ruler turned around and was about to depart, the homunculus cleared her throat slightly in hesitation and called out to her.

"Did he commit some kind of wrongdoing?"

Turning back around, Ruler tilted her head at the unexpected question.

"He?"

"I mean 'him'. The homunculus who brought about the death of my master's Servant, Saber."

There was no turmoil or emotion in her eyes… or so she had thought, but when Ruler observed carefully, she caught a glimpse of something like concern for 'him' in her eyes.

"No. From what I've heard, Saber merely responded to his wish to 'live'. Wishing to live is never a sin."

She declared that not as Ruler, but as a human being. No matter how evil one may be, the wish to live itself was not wrong. The crime of living and committing evil was another matter, though.

"…Thank you very much."

The homunculus' expression relaxed just a little. Yes, these homunculi truly were 'alive'—Ruler sighed. Their fates were almost completely determined. Their compensation as hurriedly constructed life forms was a considerably short life.

But, precisely because she was Ruler, she could do nothing about it. She had not been granted the right to take up arms for those who did not wish for salvation.

Pulling herself together, Ruler began walking in the direction of the mountain that Rider had spoken of earlier.

Although Rider of Black had recounted what he saw earlier, the bad premonition that had been clinging to her since earlier wouldn't go away. It wasn't actually rare for a Servant to self-destruct in the Holy Grail War. The circumstances varied, but for the Berserker class, there were many cases of the mad Servant self-destructing due to exhausting its prana supply. There were also Servants that used powerful Noble Phantasms and accidentally destroyed their Masters in their wake.

Though it was a rare case, there were also Servants that chose to kill themselves for the sake of their Master, and soft-hearted Servants that deployed their Noble Phantasms in order to protect innocent citizens.

But something was different this time. Saber had gouged out his own heart, and there were no anecdotes of him doing so in life—but that wasn't the reason she felt this way. Something was fundamentally different. That was only natural; after all, there now should have been only thirteen Servants left now.

So why did she feel that there were still fourteen Servants left? Why did she think that Saber of Black was still [alive]? There really was something strange about this Great Holy Grail War. Something had gone amiss. Wasn't that homunculus partially responsible for that?

No, that was merely conjecture. She didn't know for sure. She didn't know, so for now, she could only chase after him and question him.

"Rider said he headed towards this mountain, but…"

The forest, covered entirely by a Boundary Field, was so silent and still that it hurt the ears. The homunculus wasn't emitting the presence of a Servant. In other words, she had to search for [someone] who was continuously walking to get out of the forest.

However… that might unexpectedly be difficult, she began to think. After all, the homunculus was running away from Yggdmillennia. He was probably sensitive to the presence of magi and Servants more than others.

Even if she called out to him, he likely wouldn't come out. There was a good chance that he would run away in fear.

The thought *Should I stop him?* rose through her mind. In the first place, the homunculus ran away because he didn't want to be involved in this war. To him, he probably could only think of her as a nightmare trying to bring him back into the war.

But—

She gathered her prana and held it down enough to just barely negate the effects of the Boundary Field. This way, she wouldn't be detected as a Servant, and would probably be able to approach him close enough to see him with her own eyes.

But in this state, her physical abilities were no different from that of an ordinary human. Even if the moon was out, walking up a mountain road while relying on its hazy light to see was an act that would exhaust her body extraordinarily.

While settling down her rough breathing, she prayed that she would catch up with him and ascended the mountain road with determination.

Her eyes swam dizzily—but she didn't have the time to spare worrying about it.

Each step she took exhausted her stamina greatly—*just endure it a little longer,* she thought to her body.

Why did she have to go through so much trouble? —Because she wanted to meet him. The homunculus whom Rider of Black helped and Saber of Black sacrificed his life for without hesitation.

Was that all? …That, that should have been enough. Then just what was this sense of duty and purpose that troubled her so much she was at her wits' end?

No, it was better not to think about it. For the time being, it was best to just conclude that she was trying to meet him out of her own will.

…And yet, contrary to her mind, her body gradually lost that control.

It was probably Laeticia's human body. It had at last broken through the limit of its ability to continue moving, and was now only walking through Ruler's willpower. Cornered in this situation, she stifled the impatience in her heart. Walking through a mountain at night didn't mean that she could be negligent.

Resisting the temptation to sleep, she simply walked up the mountain. Perhaps due to severing the support provided by her prana, the weight of her armor was somewhat painful.

She continued to walk up the path that seemed to go on forever—and then she finally caught sight of a hazy figure standing at a place near the summit of the mountain beyond which the forest ended.

"Ah—"

She sighed in relief… but, that seemed to be a fatal action on her part. Her vision darkened all at once and the world swayed.

No, I still—I still have to endure it.

"Stop!"

She reflexively called out to him. The thought *I blundered* flitted through her mind. Even though she had gone through so much trouble so as not to frighten him away, she had called out to him at the very last moment.

Her stamina was completely used up. Before she could form some kind of counterplan, her consciousness broke off. She crouched and leaned her back against a large tree nearby.

She couldn't move. Though she wasn't going to die, she could no longer move presently. Her body needed to surrender itself to sleep. But—her shout a moment ago had probably made the homunculus think he was being pursued. If she didn't chase after him now, she would never get another chance to meet him.

She might have committed a fatal blunder. As Ruler regretted that in her heart, the faint sound of feet stepping on grass reached her ears.

It couldn't be, she thought as she raised her head. Her consciousness cleared just a little. A boy with fine, elegant features timidly extended his hand to her.

She grasped his arm at once, and whispered with a sigh of relief.

"Thank goodness… I managed to meet you!"

—And thus, the two met.

The girl who was a Servant yet had no Master, who merely devoted herself to administrating this Great Holy Grail War. The boy who was neither human nor a Servant, and who might not even be a homunculus. Both were outsiders in the ritual known as the Holy Grail War.

"Ah, um, err. I'm not an enemy."

The girl apologetically muttered that, and the boy replied with a nod empty of ill will.

"…Somehow, I understand."

Despite staggering, the girl managed to lift herself up and, after correcting her seated posture, she introduced herself.

"I am Jeanne d'Arc, summoned in the Servant class of mediator—Ruler—for this Great Holy Grail War. There is something I wish to ask you, a homunculus formerly belonging to the Fortress of Millennia, but do you mind?"

"Yeah, I have no problem with that."

"Due to the special characteristic of the Ruler class, I can detect when any of the Servants participating in the war are defeated. Currently, I can confirm that all Servants are still present, However—"

"…No. That's incorrect. Saber of Black died not long ago."

"Rider also told me that Saber had died. However, that shouldn't be. According to my senses, there are still fourteen Servants present. And you are emitting the presence of a Servant. But I understand now that I've directly met you like this. You really aren't a Servant."

Ruler took off her gauntlet, and suddenly placed her hand on his chest. Ignoring his bewilderment and embarrassment, she confirmed the sound of his heartbeat.

"—It's beating strongly. It appears to be functioning no different from a normal heart. Thank goodness. He really didn't choose a mere meaningless death."

She sighed in relief. Then, she seemed to realize what she was doing, and frantically pulled back her hand and apologized profusely.

"I'm sorry, I just—"

"No, I don't really mind… Are there no problems with me?"

The boy asked that somewhat uneasily, but Ruler shook her head and assured him, "You're fine." Frankly, his [heart] was functioning so perfectly it was unbelievable. If one excluded his Magic Circuits and his ability to perform magecraft, he was no different from an ordinary human.

"It's just as Rider of Black said. You are free."

When she said that, the homunculus' expression involuntarily clouded over. Seeing that, Ruler quizzically questioned him.

"Is something wrong?"

"No. I naturally understand the meaning of the word [freedom]. But… I don't know what I should do."

Sieg honestly spoke his worries. Ruler tilted her head in curiosity. She knew that Rider of Black had spoken happily of the boy's future when she was at the castle.

"He'll surely go to the village and then use that as a stepping stone to go to a town. He'll come into contact with lots of people, move forward while being healed and wounded, and then come to love someone. Yeah, how wonderful!"

When Ruler told him of Rider's words, he shook his head and denied that future.

"Yeah, certainly, if I'm [free] now—that is probably also a possibility for me. But for some reason, I don't feel the desire to do that at all."

He turned his face down, wearing a gloomy expression that conveyed his apologies to Rider. Ruler spoke up to comfort him.

"A lot has just happened to you, so I don't think your feelings will simply change so soon afterwards… But perhaps you have a different wish?"

"A different, wish…"

The future he had been given by Rider was without a doubt attractive. But for some reason, he didn't feel attracted to it. So maybe there was a something else… a different future he wished for.

"If you say you have no dreams, then first you should experience freedom and then search for a dream. But, if you already have a dream—you should express it honestly. That's what I think."

A dream, his own dream. What was it really? Closing his eyes—Sieg thought back on his life. He had wished to live and escaped, asked for help, tried to escape in order to live and failed, and even though he had died once, he was revived like this and obtained freedom.

It was an extremely short life, but he had been blessed with much good fortune. Even though he was no different from the other homunculi… No, he had become different from the other homunculi. They died out without exception, and he lived.

It was simple to just say, 'It can't be helped', and end the matter there. With those words, he could simply cast them away. But, he absolutely couldn't say, 'It can't be helped'. Earlier, in spite of being ordered to search for him, his fellow homunculi had purposefully overlooked him.

What was that happiness he felt when he heard about that from Rider afterwards? Was it not because he felt a bond with his fellow homunculi, who had overcome even their master's orders?

Then.

Then, it's easy to understand what my wish is.

I became free. That's why I want to free everyone else as well. Like how Rider, Saber and Archer gave me freedom.

Wish, my wish, my dream… is to save them. I want to save my former self… my fellow homunculi who will die at this rate.

They're immersed in that rotting juice, only able to feel frightened. It's normal for all living things to have death as a fixed part of their future, but for it be decided that they couldn't do anything *until then is just too unreasonable and sad.*

Like how Rider saved me, I'll save them. If I do that, I feel like I'll be able to stick out my chest with pride if I ever meet Rider again. I'll be able to say that I saved everyone else who wished for freedom—

They said, 'please save us'. I heard them. I can't act as if I didn't hear them and run away from it.
pride
Upon this heart entrusted to me by a hero, that is the one thing I can never do.

"…I want to save them."

"Who do you want to save?"

"My comrades, those who are the same kind of being as me. Those who can't even cry out even though they begged to be saved. The ones who live just to die without even being able to expect help."

"…You mean to say you will save the homunculi in that castle?"

Sieg nodded at Ruler's question.

"But… that isn't what Rider wanted, right?"

Exactly, that Servant should have just wished for the homunculus to be happy. For him to have a peaceful life without battle.

"I know… But, that peaceful, ordinary life. That dream… isn't my dream."

Rider's feelings had truly made him happy. Even so, he wanted to do this.

"I heard it. I heard their wish to 'someone' asking for help. I can't just live and turn my eyes away from that."

It was like a chain to him. The homunculus, having been saved by much good fortune, understood that joy very well. …The great joy of having someone grasp the hand you held out. It was an emotion that the other homunculi would probably never experience in their lives.

…A strange feeling of guilt crept through his body. It was something that couldn't be helped, but his heart *wanted to do something about it*.

Ruler had her breath taken away by Sieg's words.

Though the source of the voice he heard was different, he hid the same determination as her within himself. She tried to respond to the laments of the Lord, and he was trying to respond to the laments of his fellow homunculi. Even though Ruler couldn't hear their voices asking to be saved, this boy heard them.

Therefore—

"…I can't stop you."

"Hmm? …If it's you, I think you have plenty of ways to stop me, though."

"No, I was talking to myself. In other words, you intend to return to the castle now and persuade the homunculi to run away?"

"…I'm thinking of various approaches to take to do that, but that's basically it."

"What do you think your chances of success are?"

"Right now, it's equivalent to zero. But that doesn't mean I'm going to run away."

"Please cut it out with the reckless charging ahead. That is the same as trampling over Rider's good will."

Of course, he didn't intend to do that. But… currently, Sieg couldn't come up with anything that could be called a plan.

"I have a question for you as the mediator of the Great Holy Grail War. The Black faction is using homunculi like me as a prana supply. That could be called a violation in the Holy Grail War, right?"

Ruler's expression darkened. Yes, rescuing the homunculi was his objective. But the journey ahead of him was filled with too many difficulties. The biggest problem right now was the difficult question of whether this could be called a violation if one strictly applied the rules.

"…From what I have seen, the homunculi are participating in the Holy Grail War of their own will. At the very least, that's how a homunculus answered when I asked her."

Because it was their master's order, they agreed to fight. That was a course of action that not only homunculi, but also many humans had taken. In the first place, Servants participated in battle fundamentally for that reason.

"Our will is extremely weak. We're beings that just obey the orders we're given."

"But you yourself possess a sense of self and are acting according to it."

"That's true, but—"

"If they are participating in the Holy Grail War of their own will, I don't think it's my place to speak out. You can ask the homunculi whether they are participating of their own will and obtain an answer from them, can't you?"

The homunculus was at a loss for words. It was doubtful that he would get an ideal answer from them if he asked. Since the moment they were born, obeying someone's orders was everything to them. Their will to resist was pretty much nonexistent.

"But it's true that this is something I cannot overlook. It's a general rule that the supply of prana should be conducted between Master and Servant alone. To ignore that rule on such a large scale and so openly… it might be a bit of a problem. But, even if I order them to correct the situation, they do not have the obligation to obey."

"Don't you have that kind of authority, since you're the mediator?"

"I do, but… the number of times I can use it is limited. To be more specific, I have been granted the right to enforce *up to two orders on each Servant*."

"That's—"

Ruler nodded at his surprised expression. Yes, this was her greatest privilege as Ruler. The rights to enforce absolute orders on Servants that each Master possessed three of—in other words, [Command Spells].

"However, I cannot use a Command Spell as the mediator when it comes to minor matters… No, naturally, this is just my own criterion."

Of course, if she used the Command Spells, she could even control who obtained the Holy Grail as an extreme example. She could just order the Servant who she didn't want to obtain it to commit suicide.

However, that was precisely why she needed laws inside herself. If she got rid of those, she wouldn't be Ruler, but just a despot.

As the homunculus slumped his shoulders in defeat, Ruler felt her heart tighten. Just as he said, it was too harsh to ask for a display of [will] from the homunculi.

"…I have a suggestion. Don't you think the homunculi would open their hearts if you talked to them? Why don't you show them the things the ones that rule them haven't shown them?"

"That's…"

The boy began to ponder hard. As a homunculus like them, he might be able to make an appeal regarding their wretched conditions. Then it was possible that Ruler might act a little as well. If that was enough to break out the homunculus who sought help and chose to withdraw from the war from the castle—

"If I can save my comrades that way, I think I'll try it."

"I see… In that case."

To be honest, this was an act just on the borderline of Ruler's jurisdiction. She was supporting this homunculus too much.

But… even if she were to say she wouldn't cooperate with him now, he probably wouldn't stop.

As long as Rider of Black existed, he would undoubtedly cause chaos among the Black faction. And with matters already being complicated due to the Red faction aiming to kill her as well, she couldn't allow for the war's order to crumble any further.

First giving a light cough and then puffing out her chest, she spoke in a deliberately crabby manner.

"—It can't be helped. The situation is unavoidable, so from now on I'll direct and manage your actions. Have no worries, I will consider your will as much as possible. However, please refrain from taking any absurd and reckless actions. Understood?"

"Mgh…"

"This isn't a situation that you can deal with by yourself right now."

"That's true… but."

"Most of all! If you go back to that castle by yourself right now, we have no idea what Rider of Black… Astolfo might do. I feel deeply, deeply anxious about that…"

She grumbled as if she felt anxious from the bottom of her heart.

"…That's true."

After all, he was a Heroic Spirit who blew off reason all the way to the moon. If the homunculus acted carelessly, Rider would definitely go on a rampage inside the castle for his sake.

"Therefore, please follow my lead. Is that fine with you? It's fine, right? Answer me!"

Overpowered by Ruler as she suddenly and forcefully pressed him for an answer, the boy frantically nodded.

"U-Understood… I'll obey you."

Ruler was about to hold out her gauntlet-less hand to shake, but then suddenly realized. She had yet to hear his name.

"I'm sorry, but about your name—"

"Please call me 'Sieg'. Though this was originally his name, not mine."

The boy spoke with his hand placed against his chest as if somehow proud of that.

"Since he's gone now, I must live. When I consider that, this name seems appropriate… that's what I think, but how about it?"

"I understood. So your name is Siegfried then."

"No, that's wrong. Just *Sieg* is fine. I feel that that hero's name is too heavy for me. I probably wouldn't be able to live like he did."

He probably wouldn't able to sacrifice his life without hesitation like he did—

He whispered that with some regret and frustration.

"That's only natural. You have merely obtained a position that allows you to just barely do something. You aren't a hero who has already accomplished the things you needed to do like him."

It was mere disgusting arrogance to force a boy with an infinite future spread out before him to sacrifice his life. No matter how much he looked like an adult in appearance, he—was still very young.

"I see… Yeah, I understand."

Sieg obediently nodded. *What a good boy,* Ruler pleasantly thought. Then, she offered her hand again. And the boy gingerly grasped that hand.

"Then, let's return to the castle without delay… If we meet Rider, please leave it to me to properly explain things to him so it doesn't turn into a quarrel."

"All right. Then, let's go."

"Yes, let's go!"

Ruler turned around to face away from the village at the base of the mountain. And then, after taking a few steps forward, she weakly collapsed to her knees.

"W-What's wrong?"

Sieg frantically rushed over to her, and Ruler replied with a deeply apologetic expression.

"Umm… I'm sorry, but let's go to the village at the base of the mountain."

"Why?"

His question was answered by a sound more eloquent than words. It was the trill of her stomach; in other words, it was the sound of her stomach growling.

"I don't think it's possible, but are you—"

"I'm sorry, but could you please carry me on your back while you're at it? My stomach is empty and I can't move…"

It was that impossibility. She was out of gas. Thinking back on it, since eating dinner, she had been running around here and there without eating or drinking until it was near dawn, and she had lacked the time to rest after using her holy water to search. It was only for an instant, but her consciousness had flicked off earlier.

Even if it was no problem for a Servant, she had expended too much energy as a human. If she expended a massive amount of prana, she could move, but—she could not endure this despairing sensation of hunger forever.

"…I feel anxious about our future prospects."

Ruler had no words she could respond with.

***

"How is Lancer?"

"Instead of going into spiritual form, my Lord is sitting on his throne and seems to be thinking about something. He appears to be considering some matters from his discussion with Ruler."

Gathered together in one of the castle's rooms, the head of the Yggdmillennia clan, Darnic, and Archer stood in front of each other as they started working out their plans from now on.

"To think that Saber would drop out so early on…"

Darnic wore a dark expression. It was only natural; the one extolled as the greatest of the seven Servant classes, Saber, possessed outstanding talent that should have ensured he survived until the final stages of the war. There were Servants like Caster and Assassin who excelled at targeting their opponent's weak points, and Servants like Rider who overwhelmed the enemy with an abundance of Noble Phantasms—so it wasn't like the Saber class had an absolute advantage, but unlike those other classes who suffered from the issue of compatibility with their enemies, the Saber class could deal with any type of enemy in battle with its all-purpose strength and skills.

Moreover, Saber of Black had been Siegfried, the great hero of the Netherlands. Excluding Saber of Red, he should have been able to dominate any battle no matter what Servant he faced.

"It's no use regretting what's past now. The Red faction will probably detect Saber's death sooner or later. When they do, there is a high chance that they'll attack to try and finish us off in one stroke."

The Red faction had lost Berserker to them and was also down to six Servants. If Archer were their commander, he would want to attack before the Black faction made countermeasures to deal with Saber's loss. They had the best chance of winning now while the Black faction wasn't prepared.

"Caster's Noble Phantasm will be necessary."

"…I heard we haven't yet gathered all the necessary materials yet, though."

A Servant's Noble Phantasm was brought into this world when they were summoned, and was naturally compiled out of prana. Though there were sometimes necessary conditions for activating it, it was rare for the Noble Phantasm itself to require materials to construct it.

Most of the time, this occurred in cases where the Noble Phantasm still existed in the world up to the present day. However, in this case, what was needed was the Noble Phantasm itself instead of the materials.

A Noble Phantasm was not an unknown weapon. Noble Phantasms were none other than the ultimate mysteries of Heroic Spirits that were sublimated into their legends. Therefore, Noble Phantasm were already completed existences… normally speaking.

If there was a Noble Phantasm that did not follow this logic, it would be something too huge to be possessed by a single Heroic Spirit, or—something that was incomplete but still carved into legend.

"There's just one material left. If we can obtain it, Caster can activate his Noble Phantasm."

"…A first-class *magus*."

Darnic spoke with a grim expression. Hearing those words, Archer finally understand the reasons for various things that had been happening.

"…I see. So that's why Caster wanted that homunculus."

"That's right. Caster's Noble Phantasm requires a [core] to function, and the quality of the core is reflected in the power of the Noble Phantasm. The only ones that possess the necessary talent among our clan are—"

"The seven who became Masters. And also the homunculus in question."

"We can gather any number of second-rate and third-rate magi as materials. However, a magus who is the successor of a thousand-year-old Magic Crest can't be obtained in such a short period of time."

"I don't think that the homunculus has a Crest, though—"

"But that homunculus was made using crafting techniques stolen from the Einzberns. It's not unusual for an extraordinary monster to be born among those we created. Caster probably noticed that."

That's true, Archer thought with a nod. His Magic Circuits were first-class. As a result, his feeble body hadn't been able to endure the power of his Circuits.

"But at this point, capturing that homunculus is a dim prospect. In other words…"

"We have to use someone among us as the materials, huh?"

"Yes. In that case, there is only one person who qualifies."

Darnic muttered with a bitter smile.

Archer guessed that he was probably referring to Gordes Musik Yggdmillennia. Especially since Saber had chosen his own death, his Master was definitely not unrelated.

When he regained consciousness, Gordes had shaken pitifully before Lancer's cross-examination of what had happened and had blamed everything on Saber and Rider. Watching him do that had not brought pleasant feelings even to a Servant like Archer.

Gordes had forgotten that, at the same time as being his Servant, Saber was also the undying hero Siegfried who was unparalleled in history… No, perhaps it was more accurate to say that he averted his eyes from that fact.

If Saber didn't obey his Master's orders, it was probably due to his own beliefs. To try and overcome that with a high-handed attitude was completely out of the question. As a matter of fact, Archer felt that Gordes' arrogant attitude had caused Lancer's anger towards Rider to cool down.

"Was it okay to make Caster the Master of Berserker of Red?"

Though Gordes had lost Saber, he still had one of his Command Spells left, and continued to possess the rights of a Masters. If he were to make a new contract, it was only be natural to do so with Berserker of Red, but—

The contract with Berserker had already been completed with Caster as a proxy Master.

"We can't expect anything from Berserker's Master, after all. Once we transfer Gordes' Command Spell to Caster, his role will end after guiding Berserker's rampage with the Command Spell."

"…I see."

Darnic rolled his eyes in exasperation.

"Have we still not received any word from Assassin's Master?"

"No. Thanks to the [spirit board], we know that Assassin hasn't died, but—"

The worst possible scenario passed through their heads. A member of the Yggdmillennia, Sagara Hyouma, had purposefully departed for his homeland in the Far East and performed the summoning of his Servant with perfect preparation.

They confirmed that the summoning itself had succeeded through the [spirit board]. But they couldn't confirm if the Master was Sagara Hyouma.

In other words, there was a high probability that someone besides Sagara had become the Master. Assassin of Black—Jack the Ripper—had a short history and was a serial killer, which was far from the level of a Heroic Spirit, but with the special characteristics of his class, he undoubtedly specialized in killing Masters.

In that regard, Assassin was quite a terrifying Servant to have as an enemy.

"Having both Assassins in the Red faction is the worst possible outcome, but…"

Darnic shook his head at Archer's words, as if to say that he didn't want to even consider the possibility. It was then that the door suddenly opened and the two of them turned to look at the same time.

"Grandfather, Archer. May I have a minute of your time?"

The one who barged in was Archer of Black's Master, Fiore Forvedge Yggdmillennia. Normally, she acted in a graceful manner in all situations, but for once, she wore a highly bewildered expression.

"What's wrong, Fiore? To not even knock—"

Without answering, Fiore silently put a newspaper on the table. Darnic and Archer focused their gazes on a particular news article.

"This is…"

"It appears that a serial killer has appeared in Romania's capital, Bucharest. The deaths have spread north of Bucharest to Sighișoara."

Darnic frantically poured over the newspaper. While the details on the murders themselves were sparse, there were already more than thirty victims, and all of Romania appeared to be in a panic.

"I thought it was just a coincidence, but please look here. The list of victims—"

What Fiore pointed at was the photo of a woman. Though they were low grain photos, one could see that she possessed well-ordered features. Only the words [Unidentified] were written in the caption beneath the photo.

"Her name is Pemetrekis. —She is a magus who was in the same department as me at the Association."

At her words, Darnic also recognized the seriousness of the situation. If this were a mere serial killer, one could just disregard it as a coincidence. But that was impossible if a magus was included among the list of victims. Moreover, she was probably one of the magi who had been despatched to Trifas.

"Is she a magus weak enough to be killed by a serial killer?"

"…No. Pemetrekis is a magus specialized in intelligence-gathering. Adding in the battle abilities of her familiars, a normal magus wouldn't be able to contend with her in battle."

"—In other words. This serial killer possesses the ability to kill magi."

If the serial killer was simply a magus who surpassed her level, then it was still a minor matter. But the name of a monster that was famous for surpassing magi by far came to their minds.

Servant Assassin—Jack the Ripper. Had he arrived in Romania? If so, just what on earth was his Master thinking? At the very least, they couldn't imagine he was sane if he was turning a blind eye to these abnormal events that even appeared in the newspaper. He was stepping far off from the general rule of all magi to conceal their mysteries from the public.

"That's right. What should we do, grandfather? This isn't something that can be ignored."

After pondering for a while, Darnic decided to despatch several of their clan's magi who were on standby in Trifas at the moment.

"…If this really is the work of Assassin of Black, magi won't be able to fight him at all."

No matter how weak any Servant might be, they were all Heroic Spirits. They had reached the domain of what could be called the ultimate mysteries. Not to mention the opponent was Assassin, whose abilities were specialized in killing Masters.

"Should we not head out as well?"

Fiore's suggestion was certainly reasonable. But it was a different story if she had to leave Trifas and go all the way to Sighișoara. Despatching Servants in this situation and weakening their defences in this situation was—

As Darnic's thoughts had reached a dead end, he received a telepathic communication from Caster.

'Reporting. It seems Saber of Red and her Master have left Trifas.'

'Left… Do you know where they've gone to?'

'They appear to have headed to Sighișoara. If I observe that city with my remote viewing thaumaturgy, my surveillance here will become somewhat insufficient, though… what should be done?'

'Please keep maintaining your surveillance over Trifas as you have. But I also want information on Sighișoara to some extent. If you have the power to spare, divert it to observing Sighișoara.'

There could only be one of two reasons why Saber of Red and her Master—the bounty-hunting necromancer Shishigou Kairi—were heading to Sighișoara.

To kill Assassin of Black or to join forces with his Master. Either way, the Black faction couldn't remain a mere spectator in this situation.

They currently had six Servants and six Masters under their control, but they could use only one Servant as a scout. From a defensive standpoint, they couldn't send out two or more Servants.

"Archer. And Archer's Master, Fiore. You are to head to Sighișoara. Assassin of Black… and Saber of Red are there."

Fiore's expression visibly stiffened faintly at the mention of Saber of Red. A clash with the Servant who was their most formidable enemy in the Great Holy Grail War. She guessed that

crossing blades with her Master Shishigou Kairi would be inevitable. Hence the reason for her stiffened expression.

"…Understood. We'll depart as soon as we finish making preparations. Let's go, Archer."

But though she was tense as she nodded, Fiore was not afraid. Her trust in her Servant was naturally one reason for that, but it was also because—she possessed absolute pride in her own abilities as well.

"Understood, Master. Then, Darnic-dono, please pardon us."

Fiore exited the room with Archer, and Darnic let out a short breath.

"The world truly is beyond my control. But that's fine. I already decided to put my life on the line to separate from the Association of Magi. An incident of this level is within my expectations."

Naturally, Darnic had also taken into consideration the possibility that he himself would be defeated and that their clan would be destroyed. But his response to that would probably be 'So what?'. Darnic remembered well how many clans had died out gloomily without even getting the chance to reach the Root.

They had gotten that chance. That alone was unexpected good fortune. And of course, Darnic had no intention of being defeated.

***

—It's not my fault.

Alone in his room, Gordes was crushed by humiliation and terror.

"It's not my fault."

Muttering that, Gordes drank down an entire glass of alcohol while trembling, trying to deny his own blunder. The taste of the expensive alcohol placed on his night table wasn't that good. It was a bitter taste that pierced his tongue. Not only was the taste bad, but he also couldn't get drunk on it—it truly was a fraud product.

"Yes, it's a fraud. That damn hero… as if that could be Siegfried."

He stopped drinking—wasn't what he did. He drank and drank, but—his head hurt, and he remembered the gaze of that annoying swordsman.

Just remembering it made his thoughts, his heart, regain calm.

It hadn't been ugly or beautiful. It hadn't been filled with coldness or killing intent either. It had just *waited*.

"What should I do?"

If it had held expectations for Gordes' answer, he might have had the time to think. If that gaze had been cold or angry, he would have complied out of fear—even if he was its Master.

If it had calmly given a proposal with merits and demerits—Gordes might have refused, but he wouldn't have been that enraged by it.

That's not what it did. It had just waited robotically. It had waited for him to choose Yes or No.

That wasn't the bond between Master and Servant. *I was just a pebble*—Gordes thought.

Gordes was a pebble on the path to achieving his objective. Gordes was in the way, so he kicked him away to the side of the path. That was probably the level of recognition he had given Gordes.

"As if that could be a hero."

Even as he grumbled those complaints, he understood—but he averted his eyes from it. He just continued to avert his eyes. Because that would force him to face his own foolishness as well.

You don't understand anything.

The terror, shame and sorrow of his Servant realizing that and saying it to him. To prevent that, he acted that way. He didn't speak to him and wasn't spoken to either. Because Gordes tried to treat him as a Servant *(tool)*, Saber could only treat Gordes as a Master *(tool)* as well.

That was only natural. Gordes treated everything besides himself as tools. His objective was the restoration of the proud alchemist Musik family. Even becoming part of the Yggdmillennia clan was a mere stepping stone for the sake of that goal. That was what he was taught. His father and mother said that, and his grandfather and grandmother said that.

…He knew that wasn't right. He knew that, but he couldn't think of a way to bring about change. Following the rules imposed on him made his heart feel at ease. *We'll triumph one day.* That sworn revenge was pushed upon the next generation by his grandfather, grandmother, father and mother.

He had also of course intended to push it upon his son. Once this war was over, he planned to start the incremental transplant of his Magic Crest to him.

His son also saw him as a tool. He had immediately understood that from his son's obscure eyes that seemed to rebel at him without trying to hide it… After all, he was the spitting image of Gordes who was reflected in those eyes.

If, he suddenly thought.

If he had recognized his Servant not as a tool, but as a hero with his own personality like the Forvedge siblings had.

Perhaps Saber's machinelike eyes would have changed somehow. Perhaps the future would have been different.

Gordes laughed scornfully at his own thoughts and poured more alcohol into his glass.

"Ridiculous. What good does it do to think of it now?"

He gulped down the alcohol, but even so—Gordes thought. If, at that time, he had responded to Saber's suggestion—no, ridiculous. It was ridiculous, so he stopped thinking about it. He was a loser, a dropout. Now he could only leave the rest to someone else.

Concluding that, Gordes finally started to feel the alcohol take effect on his mind.

Geez, how annoying.

While twisting her intelligent and beautiful face in anger, Celenike walked through the hallway with loud and rough footsteps. No matter how much she tormented her Servant, she didn't feel refreshed by it all due to the frivolous smile he always wore.

She had the greatest feast before her eyes, but she couldn't touch it. Not only was she not allowed to eat it, but it also remained too hard to chew no matter how much she stabbed at it with a fork.

To Celenike, who was raised and doted upon by the old female magi who practiced the dark arts, patience and self-control were the same things as torture. She could only maintain self-control with things regarding magecraft.

If there was anything that could bring a smile to her noble-looking face, it would probably be for someone to bring the homunculus whom Rider had protected before her. If she gouged out his eyes, cut off his arms, pulled out his tongue and made him eat his own intestines right in front of Rider, even Rider would probably lament and despair.

She wanted to see that expression. She wanted to see it no matter what. If she could see the expression of Astolfo, known as being the loveliest among Charlemagne's famous Twelve Paladins, twist in despair, she wouldn't even mind dying.

—At the same time. She seemed to greatly hate the homunculus who had stolen Rider's heart to this extent.

There was something that Astolfo had never given her no matter how much she wished so since he had been summoned as Rider of Black.

It could probably be called love. Cherishment, affection and the joy that came with it were emotions that Celenike had difficulty understanding.

Why wouldn't he direct those emotions towards her? How annoying. Even though that homunculus has just a transient life like a mayfly.

In reality, she had wanted to search for him till the bitter end. Not only was she skilled in magecraft, Celenike also had the most vindictive personality among the Yggdmillennia clan. To her, the homunculus was already nothing more than an annoying pest. The kind of bug that one had to search for through even the roots of grass and eradicate.

But she couldn't take up her time to search for a single homunculus. Finding him wasn't impossible with her dark arts. But a lot of preparations would need to be made to do so, and it was made harder since the homunculus whose whereabouts were unknown was also an excellent magus.

There would be no point to it if she attacked unskillfully and ended up being bitten by a cornered mouse. She could do nothing but give up regarding the homunculus until the end of this war.

It made her want to see Rider's anguished face and do even more extreme things to him. She wanted to violate him, disgrace him, and dye him in despair—but Celenike somehow managed to hold herself back from such wicked acts. Once this war was over, once her side won, she could do so with no problems.

Once they beat the Red faction, she would give up her wish and participation in the war. She would use all three Command Spells to violate Rider until he died.

Perhaps it was because she was walking in such an overly irritated manner, but a homunculus bumped into her shoulder as she passed. The young boy, in charge of setting the table for meals, bowed his head and apologized with vacant eyes.

I'll do it to him, Celenike decided.

"You, come with me for a bit."

The homunculus had no right to refuse. And Celenike had not one fragment of sympathy for a homunculus servant. Furthermore, consumption was a virtue for magi.

With a vulgar pleasure that even other magi would scorn, Celenike decided to release the stress she'd kept building up for the time being.

—*Something weird has happened.*

Roche Frain Yggdmillennia sighed. He stirred up his extremely curly hair and tried to settle his disordered thoughts.

Their side's Saber had fallen. Moreover, it was due to suicide. He thought Heroic Spirits were people with a bit more sense, but that didn't seem to be the case.

"Geez, how absurd."

This should have been a war with plenty of leeway for their side.

With Lancer of Black, Saber of Black, Archer of Black and the combination of him and Caster, he had been confident that they could knock down any enemy. To put it more accurately, he had confidence in making golems that could deal with anything.

The Black Masters valued his golems far too lightly. Certainly, Saber of Red had cut them down with a single strike. But those were golems made to serve as lookouts. It didn't mean that they were inferior to the others he made, but their purpose was strictly detection and giving reports. Golems that displayed true battle specs wouldn't have been defeated so one-sidedly.

Of course, they would have been defeated in the end, but his golems existed in the hundreds. Saber might not get injured against ten or twenty of them, but if she was attacked in waves with golems numbering beyond a hundred, who knows what might have happened?

…He was fully aware that it was an abstract academic theory. However, the possibility of that was definitely not low.

But in truth, he understood it was expecting too much for Saber to be taken down by his battle-type golems.

The problem was Caster's Anti-Army Noble Phantasm, **Royal Crown, the Light of Wisdom**. Naturally, he guessed that Caster's Noble Phantasm was also a golem. But for some reason, Caster was vague about its precise form.

Golem Keter Malkuth

…That was because Roche was still inexperienced. He wanted to think that was the reason. However, based on the words Caster sometimes let slip, it at least seemed to be a huge golem. After that, Caster of Black had told him this as well.

—This golem is not meant to be invincible.

—Rather, it must be designed so that it can die through any kind of means.

—The golem I'm creating possesses life. Therefore, it will die.

—My golem is not a craft to simple move clay dolls. My golem is the creation of life… in other words, a copy of the original human, Adam.

That was the being Caster aimed to create. To Roche who thought that it was sufficient to just create a capable golem, Caster's thinking was extremely shocking.

He wanted to help, and if he couldn't do that, he wanted to at least be next to him to watch him make it. Frankly speaking, the Great Holy Grail War was nothing other than a troublesome event for Roche. If it weren't for the battle around the Holy Grail, he wouldn't have been able to witness the miracle of summoning Heroic Spirits, and naturally, he wouldn't have met Caster of Black—Avicebron.

So fighting in the war couldn't be helped. But although there were still a ton of things he wished to learn from Caster, the length of the Great Holy Grail War was far too short… Because of that, Roche had decided on what to wish for.

His wish was for Caster to be fully resurrected. Caster also had a wish he wanted to fulfill in the present world, so it should be fine to assist him a little.

When he heard Roche's wish, Caster of Black had said, "Thank you." It didn't mean that Caster's detached attitude had changed, and his teaching didn't become softer.

But they communicated through the heart. Just knowing that was a great yield to Roche.

He didn't find it this interesting to mingle with other people. It was rarer for there to be someone whom he could respect from the bottom of his heart. Roche's parents had never shown interest in him. No, even if being raised by golems was a tradition of the Frain family, he had never once felt love and affection even beyond that.

That might be necessary for a magus. Love for one's family was sometimes a heavy burden in the quest for magic. So it's better not to give any love from the beginning. At the very least, that was the policy of the Frain family.

Furthermore, Roche was a child who was called the Frain's greatest masterpiece since the family had joined Yggdmillennia.

Roche himself recognized that as well. He had carefully read the numerous grimoires that contained the feelings of his ancestors as if their blood ran through it, and had tilted his head in puzzlement at why they would explain in drawn-out words such a simple—easily understood thing.

And then, he had summoned a genius. He was overwhelmed by him right from the start, and then admired him. The man who was on the same level as him… no, who he thought might even be lowering his level to match his.

It was unthinkable for him to serve Roche. Roche himself had to be taught by him. And one day, he would watch from beside him as Caster fulfilled his dream.

He would do anything for the sake of that. If human lives were necessary, he would mow down as many as it took. He would even do things that would undermine his own family.

It can't be helped. After all, it's for the sake of fulfilling master's, our *dream—*

—Ah, that was scary.

The eldest son of the Yggdmillennia's clan's Forvedge family, Caules Forvedge Yggdmillennia, trembled while walking down the hallway as he remembered what he'd just seen.

Following closely behind him was his Servant, Berserker of Black… Though he thought that she was a little too close, like a spirit hanging off his back.

What filled him with fear wasn't the enemy. It was one of his allied Servants—Lancer of Black.

Caules still hadn't grasped exactly what had happened, but it seemed that some trouble had happened between Saber of Black and his Master Gordes.

In any case, as a result, Saber had been eliminated without even fighting. It truly was a nightmarish development. By capturing Berserker of Red and changing his Master, they had increased their number of Servants to seven. Although Assassin still hadn't joined up with them, they had at least gained the superior advantage in the quantity of their forces—just when he thought that, this happened.

Lancer of Black had naturally been furious at that report. It was truly a fit of rage. The force and intensity of it had been enough to make even Celenike, a cold-blooded practitioner of the dark arts, turn pale. To be honest, he thought it was a miracle he was currently still alive like this.

That was a Heroic Spirit; that was Lancer. Furthermore, he was Vlad III, who was known throughout the world for his harsh governance and skewers, a man who had without hesitation skewered even aristocrats who should have been his relatives.

And at the same time, the other gathered Servants were worthy of even more admiration for not having been gripped by considerable terror when they faced Lancer's rage. He could at least understand Archer, Berserker and Caster remaining calm since they were bystanders to the event. But the supposed related party, Rider of Black, had remained calm no matter how much Lancer raged… or rather, he had just smiled as if enjoying himself.

Was that strangeness of smiling in that situation without feeling even an iota of fear Rider of Black's grounds for defence? The other related party, Gordes, had desperately made excuses, but no matter how Caules thought about it, he was just reaping what he sowed.

Unfortunately, Yggdmillennia had lost Saber of Black.

But Caules was not particularly pessimistic about this incident. It appeared that Saber of Black had been Siegfried, the great hero of the Netherlands. At the same time as being truly invincible thanks to bathing in the blood of a dragon, he was famous for having died a tragic death from being pierced in the back due to a leaf from a lime tree that had clung to his back while he was bathed in the blood.

And then there was that incident—due to Gordes trying to force Saber to unleash his Noble Phantasm with a Command Spell in a fit of confusion, there was a chance that his true name had been exposed. If the Red faction found out that his true name was Siegfried, they would naturally take many countermeasures. They wouldn't just simply try to aim for his back.

Firstly, since he was a dragonslayer, they would probably try to avoid facing him with a hero possessing the blood of a dragon. Conversely, while Siegfried was a dragon-slayer, he had been bathed in the blood of a dragon, so he might receive fatal damage from Noble Phantasms that are tremendously effective against dragons.

Naturally, such countermeasures wouldn't necessarily go as well as it sounded. But… in any case, the enemy could work out that many countermeasures if they found out. The Black faction's first plan had been to construct strategies that pivoted around Saber of Black, but if his true name was seen through, they would need to revise their plans. However—at the same time, there had also been the chance that his true name wasn't exposed.

In the end, that uncertain situation had beckoned confusion on the battlefield. That was the worst possible result. From the start, it was normal for the battlefield to be ruled by chaos. If even more factors that confused it were included, there was no telling what result it would lead to. Caules didn't like that kind of gambling. Saber had died, so they should just form a new system of order.

From the start, the Black faction had the advantageous position. Based on the system of the Great Holy Grail War, it was impossible for it to turn into a drawn-out war. Furthermore, this war in Trifas was known to magi throughout the world.

…Yes, for the Association of Magi who prized honor and prestige, they couldn't stand the continued existence of this Fortress of Millennia for a day or even an hour more.

In that case, they should just drop a cluster bomb on it—but as expected, that was a method that they couldn't use as the Association of Magi.

Honor, tradition and convention… there were a mountain of things beyond one's control in this world. Both the Association of Magi and the Yggdmillennia clan were bound to them.

It was simple to just discard those values as 'stupid and trivial', but—Caules himself couldn't do anything about it as someone who was bound to them. He understood that fact so well it pierced his body. The world and human life was like that.

"Well, whatever."

He would just do what he had to do. If he died along the road, that was the end of it—so Caules concluded.

"?"

Noticing that he was muttering to himself, Berserker suddenly peered at his face.

"Ah, sorry. It's nothing."

He sighed. But then, even if he said he would do what he had to do—there was nothing he could do with Berserker like this. Having lost her reason, she could only break through the enemy directly before her when she went out on the battlefield.

In other words, there was no need for any directions from Caules at all.

Even so, Berserker was, in a way, exceptionally convenient for Caules as a Servant. After all, there was almost no need for him to supply her Prana. She could absorb the residual prana that existed on the battlefield and could in effect continue to fight perpetually.

It was true that the Black Servants didn't have to fear running out of prana as long as they had the prana supply from the homunculi, but there was a limit to how much they could provide. Most of all, Caules had doubts about whether or not they could provide prana for seven Servants even with Saber gone now.

Shortly after summoning Berserker, Caules had performed battle simulations where not only did he make Berserker not absorb prana with her Noble Phantasm **Maiden's Chastity** (Bridal Chest), but also cut off her prana supply from the homunculi.

The result was that she was assaulted by light dizziness just by moving and swinging her mace several times. If she remained in that state for five minutes or longer, she'd probably be incapable of even standing.

This was Berserker's actual consumption rate of prana. It would have been a great burden to bear for Caules who was generally accepted to be a third-rate magus.

But this unease was resolved as long as Berserker had her **Bridal Chest**. Naturally, it would definitely turn into a crisis if she lost her Noble Phantasm—but she would have already pretty much lost in such a situation in the first place.

Of course, it would be an exaggeration to say that he had no problems with her, but…

He suddenly heard the familiar sound of a wheelchair squeaking across the floor. Stopping his pondering, he turned forward and found his older sister Fiore Forvedge Yggdmillennia there. The one pushing her wheelchair was her Servant, Archer of Black, Chiron.

"…Nee-san?"

Puzzled, Caules suddenly stopped walking. It wasn't that there was anything strange about her Servant pushing her wheelchair. The issue was the black suitcase she held in her lap.

"Ah, Caules."

"Nee-san, are you going out somewhere with that dangerous thing?"

It appeared he was correct, as she nodded with a solemn air.

"Yes. I'm going out to make contact with Assassin of Black and his Master."

"Contact? …I think that thing's quite dangerous to bring for just that, though."

Bronze-Link Manipulator
Stored inside Fiore's suitcase was the **Coupled Reinforce ment Mystic Code** that she had designed herself.

"Using the computer is fine, but you should at least look at the local newspaper too, Caules."

Fiore frowned and scolded Caules. "Yeah, yeah," Caules responded very half-heartedly. This made Fiore raise her eyebrows even further, but Archer gently pushed her wheelchair, stopping her sermon from going any further.

"…Geez. I'm going to have a talk with you once I return."

"I get it, I get it. I'll listen properly when you get back."

"Really? Then, I'll be going now. Look after the place while I'm gone."

Fiore left those words and departed with Archer. Seeing them off, Caules sighed, and then Berserker agitatedly pulled at his sleeve.

When he turned to face her, her silver and gold eyes, which flickered in and out of sight from behind her long forelocks, looked like they were trembling with an inner fire.

"What? Are you mad about something?"

She nodded twice.

It seemed Berserker had been angered. By whom? Obviously, by Caules. But unfortunately, she couldn't communicate with words, so he couldn't tell what she was angry about.

"Is it about Nee-san?"

For now, Caules guessed that random, and Berserker nodded affirmatively. Tilting his head in puzzlement, Caules managed to find the answer with her affirmative and negative gestures.

The two of them returned to his room and faced each other. Caules sat on a chair, and Berserker sat down on the bed facing him. Incidentally, Caules' room could probably be called the strangest room in the Fortress of Millennia. There were several grimoires on his bookshelves, a crystal ball on his desk, and chess pieces placed along the corners of the room, perhaps meant to affix a Bounded Field. All that was fine, but the problem was the computer enshrined on his desk.

Darnic grimaced, Gordes scoffed and Fiore sighed at it, but in Caules' opinion, science and technology weren't without their worth. In the first place, they were in an era where magi also had to communicate through information technology unlike a decade ago. Unexpectedly, the one who used this technology for a lot of correspondences was the dark arts practitioner Celenike. Maybe she used it to conduct research on cursing techniques performed through the computer network.

"…In other words, you mean that? You can't stomach the way I was mentally overpowered by an opponent we might have to face someday?"

Affirmative. Indeed, it was hard for him to say that Berserker's anxiety was just needless fear.

"Well… This doesn't have any persuasive power if I say this to a Servant, but my older sister is a monster, you know."

Caules' eyes became tinged with nostalgia as he sighed. Though he grumbled that she was a monster, there was a glimpse of something like pride in him as he said it.

"Well, I'm not so stupid as to resolve myself to die and commit a suicide attack. More importantly, the battle with the Red faction comes first. Just like Archer said, the other side's Rider is *extremely overpowered*."

In the first place, it was abnormal for a Servant to be unbeatable by those without divine blood. Fortunately, the Black faction had Archer. Though his Divinity received a Rank Down due to being summoned as a Heroic Spirit, he still possessed divine blood.

If they hadn't summoned him, their side's defeat would have been fixed at that point. Naturally, even without defeating the Servant, there was the option of killing his Master. However, that was a plan with little hope of success for Berserker and a third-rate magus.

"I think you also understand, but make sure you do not to fight that Rider. Okay?"

Berserker vigorously nodded her head. It appeared she had learned her lesson after fighting him just once. It couldn't be helped if her attacks wouldn't affect the enemy right from the start.

Thank goodness this is a team battle, Caules thought from the bottom of his heart. If this had been a normal Holy Grail War, he honestly didn't feel that they could have won no matter what they did. **Bridal Chest** was a constantly-active-type Noble Phantasm that was easy to use, but if Berserker unleashed her other Noble Phantasm, **Lightning Branch of Crucifixion** (Blasted Tree), with all her limiters released… the price for wielding power she normally couldn't boast of would be too high.

The price for it was death. If Berserker of Black, Frankenstein, released all her limiters and unleashed her Noble Phantasm at maximum power, all her functions would halt. Since that was what was written in the blueprint left behind by none other than Doctor Frankenstein himself, he had no choice but to believe it.

Naturally, it was also possible to unleash it without releasing her limiters, but that would lower the power output. In order to avoid as much uncertainty as possible, Caules had also measured the Noble Phantasm's power output when it was unleashed without releasing the limiters.

After putting up a Bounded Field to clear people out of the forest during the day and retreating back to what he thought was a safe distance, he had made Berserker use her Noble Phantasm.

Its power output was at best C rank, at worst D rank by his estimation. He had used golems he earnestly requested to borrow from Roche as a standard of measurement for its power, but the lightning strikes got weaker the farther they traveled from Berserker, while conversely the golems she hit at point-blank range had been literally turned into garbage.

Caules estimated that it was powerful enough to kill most Servants if the limiters were released and she fired it from point-blank range… However, the price for it was too high. There was no proportional gain in killing one enemy Servant at the cost of losing one of their own.

"…Berserker, though I think it goes without saying. Basically, don't release **Blasted Tree**'s limiters, okay?"

Berserker tilted her head oddly at Caules' warning. As expected, no matter how high her intelligence was, it appeared that Berserker was truly Berserker—Caules sighed.

In any case, for the combo of a third-rate magus like himself and Berserker who has a hard-to-use Noble Phantasm, there was no other choice but for him to strain his intelligence to come up

with a plan. Even if he was third-rate as a magus, there should be an inexhaustible number of means he can use as a Master.

"…Ah, that reminds me, Nee-san said to read the newspaper."

Suddenly, he recalled Fiore's earlier words and had a homunculus bring him a local newspaper. After thanking the homunculus, he opened the newspaper and read the article that seemed to be what she had noticed.

…Indeed, there was some truth to what she said. After he finished reading the article on the serial killer, Caules stood up.

"Now then. Berserker, sorry about this, but please look after the place while I'm gone for a bit."

"?"

Caules picked up several magical tools for summoning evil spirits and beasts that were stowed away in his desk, and equipped them on his person. He put on a bracelet with the names of beasts inscribed upon it on his wrist and stored black insect eggs in the tiptoes of his shoes.

Though they were small fries that wouldn't last even a second against a Servant, his panther familiars and his horde of earthworms that crawled into the enemy's body and caused pain would probably reasonably harass an enemy magus.

Caules once more felt his sleeve being agitatedly pulled. *Explain yourself,* Berserker's eyes demanded.

"…It's nothing, I'm just going to go help Nee-san a bit."

Saying that, Caules glanced at his computer. The email he'd received told of how the Association magi stationed in Sighișoara were being murdered one after another.

This information meant two things. First, the person who had taken out those magi was at the very least not a member of the Yggdmillennia clan. Second, the fact that Fiore was heading there meant that it was the work of a Servant.

And, though this was just guesswork on his part, if Assassin of Black and his Master were to oppose both the Yggdmillennia and the Red faction… it was conceivable that there would be a clash between Archer of Black, Assassin of Black and a Red Servant. In other words, a three-sided battle.

This was—an extremely bad situation.

"Even if the chance is one in a million, we can't afford lose Archer now. If it was one-on-one, the enemy magus would probably fight my sister. That's what it means to be a professional. But, if it's a two-on-one battle with me included—no matter how weak I am, he'll probably run away.

Because that's part of being a professional too. But it's true that we have to protect this fortress. So I'll leave you here to continue defending it. Well, in the worst case scenario, I'll call you with a Command Spell."

Berserker of Black thought that she should go along with Caules if possible in order to protect her Master, but his order to protect the fortress was also rational.

"Don't worry. I have no intention of fighting to the death with the enemy. Anyone who would fight in a two-on-one situation is either very strong or a simple fool."

There was no falsehood in Caules' words. He truly didn't intend to fight. Anyway, his sister was strong. Let alone normal magi, she wouldn't easily lose to even magi that could be called first-rate. Her altered Magic Crest, said to be ranked next to Darnic's, was like a precision instrument.

Her Servant, Archer of Black, was also a first-rate Heroic Spirit. Within the Yggdmillennia's faction, Lancer of Black was the banner and Archer of Black was the cornerstone.

That was what made the worst case scenario so frightening. If Assassin of Black and Archer of Black clashed and a Red Servant used that as an opening to defeat Archer, it would mean defeat for them.

But, just by adding Caules into the equation, the magus of the Red faction would probably choose to withdraw. Necessarily, the Red Servant would also withdraw. He could do that not through his own power, but just by being there, so it would probably be easy.

After watching Caules leave the room, Berserker suddenly took notice of the computer, which had been left on. It seemed he had forgotten to turn it off. *What a careless Master. Electricity is precious*—Berserker sighed and, without hesitation, pulled out the computer's plug.

She was scrupulously considerate as a Servant. Her Master would probably praise her for it as well.

***

Thus, it was announced that the largest-scale Holy Grail War in history—the [Great Holy Grail War] was over. The Black faction had lost, and the war ended with the Red faction as the victors. Unfortunately, the Greater Grail had ceased functioning, so no wishes could be granted, but an enormous reward was given by the Association of Magi as compensation. With the Greater Grail non-functional, they couldn't fight amongst each other either now.

The Red Masters relaxed as they pleased and soothed their fatigue from the war.

"Everyone, I truly thank you for your hard work."

Just like when they met at the beginning, Shirou Kotomine presented them black tea.

"Thank you for the tea."

The moment they put the tea to their lips, a refreshing aroma plunged inside their chests. A comfortable pleasantness that pervaded not only their lungs, but all their internal organs. Perhaps it was also because they had finished their jobs without a hitch that they felt so relaxed, to a degree they hadn't felt since they became magi.

"This is good tea."

"Thank you very much for the praise."

"Shirou. Won't you drink some?"

"No. Brewing it is my specialty, but I'm not accustomed to drinking black tea—"

Smiling wryly, he poured hot water in his own cup. *So the Japanese are like that,* the magi thought absentmindedly.

"Ah, I just remembered. Could you all please hand over your Command Spells?"

"Our Command Spells? Why?"

The Command Spells—were extremely—important—and necessary—in order to win—the war—

"Really now, everyone. Don't you remember? *The Great Holy Grail War is over*."

"…Now that you mention it, that's right."

"…Now that you mention it, that's true."

Yes, the Great Holy Grail War was over. When they heard that Ruler had joined the Yggdmillennia faction midway through, their sweat had turned cold, but they had somehow managed to deal with that as well thanks to Shirou's quick-wittedness. It had truly been a hard battle. Since the preparations before the fighting—yes, it had been quite a handful since the preparations.

"I am the overseer. I must recover all of your Command Spells and have them ready for the next Holy Grail War. I apologize for the trouble."

"It can't be helped. There's no use keeping them now anyway."

"…I suppose that's true."

"Then how about I bill the costs and expenses to the Church? If we arrange so that I provide the money and look after the Command Spells—"

"In that case, we can agree to it, but… is that all right?"

"The one being billed is the Church, not me. Think of this as my revenge against them for pushing this important task onto a junior member like me."

Laughter spilled from everyone at his expression, which was just like that of a mischievous boy. Though they had been wary of him at the start of the war, thinking him to be an assassin sent by the Church, he had in fact worked quite hard for them.

"We appreciate all the hard work you did as the overseer. We would also like to reward you, but—"

"Ah, please do not worry in that regard. I also received something from you all as proper compensation."

Someone asked what it was. Shirou spoke with a small and elusive smile like always.

"That would be your rights as Masters. That is suitable as compensation, is it not?"

I see, someone said with a nod.

"Are you really fine with something like that?"

"Yes, of course. Then, I will arrange the preparations to conduct the transfer ritual. Please enjoy chatting amongst yourselves for a short while."

"We'll do so."

—At last, without noticing the unnaturalness of the situation right till the very end, the magi decided to hand over 'that', which they should have treasured more than their lives, over to the smiling boy, free of charge.

"More importantly. How should we use the reward we received?"

"I think we should spend time relaxing and enjoying ourselves for a while. This recent job was quite hard."

"It seems that an auction for grimoires has opened at the Clock Tower. With this reward, I'll be able to buy at least three books that I've wanted for a long time."

"I'll use it to give a personal donation to my department. The budget has been constricted."

"It's no fun to use it for things related to the Association. I will…"

The war had ended. Now they just had to get their reward. Incidentally, there was one thing they just couldn't seem to understand.

Just how exactly did we win?

Even though it was something they should definitely remember, for some reason none of them could answer that question. But it all became inconsequential to them when they drank the black tea.

Only days of peace and decadence filled their memories, and everything seemed to shine. Without glory or prestige, they merely quietly passed the time in idleness—

Chapter 2

Participants in the Holy Grail War were able to see dreams. Perhaps it was due to the deep mental connection between Master and Servant.

They were able to view each other's pasts in the form of dreams. It was a phenomenon that was widely known to have occurred in the first three Holy Grail Wars and the smaller derivative Holy Grail Wars.

—So Shishigou Kairi wasn't surprised at all when he found himself in Britain in the far ancient past.

"…Well, this kind of thing happens too, I guess."

This was probably his Servant Mordred's past. When he realized it, she was already right there next to him. The sword she held was the weapon she favored in this Holy Grail War as well—
Clarent
Radiant Sword of the King.

Originally, this weapon did not belong to her. It was a sword that served as the symbol of the throne, which King Arthur had obtained and stored in his armory.

Mordred had stolen it and incited a large-scale rebellion to take the title of 'king' for herself, and now she was tightly grasping this sword in front of King Arthur as she challenged him to a one-on-one fight.

"…In other words, this is Camlann, huh?"

Yes, this place was the hill of Camlann. The site of the final decisive battle between the rebel army led by Mordred and the regular army led by King Arthur. In this sad and gloomy war, the curtains would finally close on the brilliant knightly story of King Arthur's legend.

Fired arrows pierced lightly-armored rank-and-file soldiers. Mordred, with her entire body clad in armor, pushed forward in defiance of all attacks.

King Arthur, who boasted of tremendous charisma, had finally managed to unify Britain. Yet in spite of that, why did so many soldiers approve of Mordred's rebellion?

With unification close at hand, weariness of war had spread and grown rampant within the country—that was one reason.

The scandal between Queen Guinevere and the Knight of the Lake, Lancelot, who, despite being extolled as perfect, had fallen into an immoral love, had caused the king's authority to weaken in the people's eyes—that was also one reason.

Many knights had been gripped by both a strange fear and even disdain for their king, who was too pure and upright and never acted according to personal feelings—that was also one reason.

But there was another reason.

Seeing Mordred on the battlefield, Shishigou could understand it quite well. Her way of fighting was savage. The magnificent and gallant sword technique that other knights boasted of was like a frail twig before her style.

It was a style of killing that focused on obeying her instincts and optimized her fighting habits with the greatest efficiency.

The morale of the troops who followed her from behind was high. It was a rhythm that urged people's instincts. Their footsteps banged loudly and grandly like large drums as they stepped forward.

—It was a calamity like that of a dragon.

Mordred was a famous knight. She had worked hard to be one and seemed to be so in reality. Still, if she had proceeded to the battlefield as a [knight], hundreds of thousands of soldiers probably wouldn't have followed her.

Her strength was real and somehow seemed to be filled with madness. But that very madness was her most admirable and suitable trait on the battlefield.

Since she was as strong as a monster and scattered enemies like a gall of wind, her soldiers continued to follow her as if stirred by madness.

—They wanted to see how far this mad warrior could go.

A faith that went under the name 'frenzy'. If they thought about it deeply, that was probably the only motive for the soldiers. But even if they had high morale, they were finite in numbers. One was killed, two were killed, hundreds, thousands of them died across the battlefield.

Mordred did not look back at them. Soldier—no, humans were beings that multiplied of their own accords after winning. That was how she seemed to view them.

She prioritized attacking a thick formation of enemy soldiers. When she scattered them like wood chips, she would look for another thick enemy formation and ride swiftly towards it. Enemies that faltered, enemies that resisted, enemies that ran away—she slayed them all and piled up mountains of corpses.

And as expected, Mordred paid no heed to the rank-and-file soldiers. The only one that held her interest was none other than her father—King Arthur.

"Where is King Arthur?!! Where is the King of Knights?!!"

She cried out and tore through the soldiers surrounding her by two, threefold. By challenging thick formations of the enemy, she had a high chance of treading where the king was. However,

as if fate itself refused her, the two of them never encountered each other on the battlefield no matter where she went.

But—once there were no more walls to block her, fate would finally fulfill her wish. Both King Arthur's army and Mordred's rebel army perished almost completely, leaving corpses strewn about everywhere. As Mordred rested using her sword as a cane, King Arthur finally appeared before her.

His expression was completely tranquil, containing no pity or hatred for her. That expressionless face clearly irritated Mordred.

In any case, the two of them stood facing each other. There were no longer any living beings left to get in their way.

Mordred spread her arms wide and shouted passionately. She shouted with anger, delight and all the emotions she couldn't help feeling.

"How's that?! How's that, King Arthur?! Your country ends here! It's finished! Regardless of who wins—everything is already in ruins!"

The one who received those words was a king who looked just like a youth, with features very similar to Mordred's.

Without caring about Mordred's passionate words, or even responding with words of his own, the king merely lifted his sword like some sort of machine.

That was the most unacceptable response to Mordred. Howling, Mordred swung her sword.

King Arthur parried, causing sparks to scatter as the two holy swords clashed. They were both exhausted, but both fought hard as they refused to lose. But their battle would change nothing. Just as Mordred said, no matter who won, this country was quickly falling to ruins.

"You should have known this would have happened! You should have known it would end up like this! If you had just turned over the throne to me, it wouldn't have turned out like this…!"

But even so, Mordred's sword did not slacken.

She was born as an illegitimate son, admired her father, was rejected by him, and then hated him—and now they were trying to kill each other on the battlefield like this.

—I hate you, I hate you. I hate you, the perfect king. I hate you, who didn't acknowledge my existence. Even though I was happy to be in your shadow. You never once turned around to face me.

—That's why this is a natural punishment, King Arthur. I destroyed everything, everything you had!

"Do you hate me!? Do you hate me that much!? Did you hate me for being Morgan's son!? Answer me… answer me, Arthur!!"

At that shout, Arthur finally responded to her as they crossed swords. In a cold, completely emotionless voice, the king pronounced his verdict.

"I have never once hated you. The reason I did not hand the throne over to you is because—"

You did not have the capacity to be a king.

It was a reply filled with [indifference]. He had merely understood Mordred's abilities and, without the slightest bit of emotion, divulged that she didn't have the necessary capacity.

Immediately after that, Mordred swung her sword in rage, and then, King Arthur's holy lance Rhongomyniad pierced through her chest. No matter how tough her armor was, it amounted to nothing before that lance.

—However.

Even after being fatally wounded, Mordred mustered the last of her dying strength and finally dealt a decisive blow to King Arthur. Mordred's helm split in two, revealing the face of a young girl that Shishigou was familiar with.

As blood dripped down from her lips, Mordred stretched out her hand to King Arthur who stood right before her eyes.

"——Fa, ther."

Mordred fell without touching her father. Watching steadily, King Arthur understood that he had won this battle and, without a word, turned his back to Mordred and walked away.

…After this, King Arthur was taken away by his surviving knight, Bedivere, and he had him return his sword to the lake. It was said that even after dying, he was healing his wounds in the land of fairies, Avalon.

That was how King Arthur's legend came to an end.

Paying no attention to King Arthur as he walked away, Shishigou gazed at the fallen Mordred. He sighed and muttered to himself.

"…Damn it, what a terrible dream."

It was so real. This dream was so lifelike he could even smell the blood on the battlefield. Mordred merely lay there with vacant eyes, her expression completely lifeless.

Yes, the current Mordred was completely a corpse. She would probably eventually be stripped of everything she had on her and rot away while devoured by insects.

King Arthur became a legend, and Mordred was remembered as the knight who tarnished that legend.

Since all the soldiers that followed her had been slain, there was no one left to remember her. That was only natural. This was a battlefield… those who lost and became bleached corpses were finished with this world.

Her passion, her keen wish was recorded nowhere and merely disappeared. Truly. Right until her last moments, she died in obscurity without even her parent turning back to look at her.

"—Ah, geez. I drew a troublesome Servant."

There's a limit even to compatibility, Shishigou thought. In the end, a Servant was merely a visitor from the past. Connecting with each other was important, but plunging in too deeply was out of the question. Once they got their hands on the Holy Grails, their relationship would end.

That's why this truth was extremely irritating. A child who wished for her father's love was the worst bad joke to Shishigou.

While waiting to wake up from the dream, Shishigou sat down beside Mordred's corpse. And then he merely gazed aimlessly at the perished people of a ruined country.

No matter the era or nation, the scene of a country's last moments were always the same—

Thus, morning came, and the first words that came out of Shishigou's mouth were directed at Saber of Red and filled with ill humor.

"Geez, don't show me strange dreams."

"…I don't really get it, but is that my fault?"

Even Saber of Red was wide-eyed with amazement at such an unreasonable complaint.

The place the two of them awoke in wasn't the catacombs of Trifas. It was in the room of a small hotel in Sighișoara. Just in case, they weren't using a room they had rented themselves, but a room they had gotten someone else to pay for using suggestion magecraft.

Having received a message from the Association of Magi, Shishigou had decided to temporarily withdraw from Trifas, where they'd been hiding, to go to Sighișoara. Famous for its historical buildings and architecture, this city appeared to be currently ruled by fear due to a serial killer that had suddenly appeared.

"…So. Why are we here?"

"Because the Association magi who were on standby here as backup have been massacred."

The somewhat unbalanced pair drank coffee at an open terrace café under the clear autumn sky. Saber of Red turned her face away in displeasure, and Shishigou silently read the city's local newspaper.

"Magi have been massacred… huh."

There were no openings in Trifas for Association magi to enter the town, but the nearby city of Sighișoara was a different matter. Many magi had been stationed here as backup personnel. While their strength in battle was inferior to that of the magi hired as the Red Masters, there were countless other things they could do such as surveillance and despatching familiars.

They had diligently observed the battle between Saber of Black and Lancer of Red outside Trifas as well and had provided valuable information for Shishigou.

However, he appeared to have suddenly lost all communication with them. The Association of Magi had ordered them to give periodic reports. It was only natural to think that something abnormal had occurred.

"It's possible that a Servant is involved. So, we were called to go and check it out since we're acting freely on our own."

"Soul devouring, huh… But why are they doing that here instead of Trifas?"

In order for a Servant to remain secured to this world, an enormous amount of prana is necessary. Providing that prana is the Master's role, but second- and third-rate magi or simply ordinary people who became Masters cannot do even that. As a result, they have to attack innocent people and supplement their Servants with human souls.

It was a normal practice, but depending on the nature of the Heroic Spirit, there were Servants that would object to that method. Also, even for magi, using this method was a humiliation that

was equivalent to declaring they were cornered or were a second-rate magus. There weren't that many magi who would willingly choose to do so.

"That's also one of the things we'll be investigating. Maybe they didn't want to cause a disturbance in Trifas, or—"

Shishigou spread out his newspaper and pointed at a simply drawn map. In the beginning, the murder had started at Bucharest and then gradually went north. Seeing that, Saber nodded in understanding.

"Maybe they're devouring souls while heading towards Trifas."

"Exactly. All the Red Servants have been gathered according to Shirou, and he said that they aren't devouring any souls. If we trust those words, then the culprit must be the only one whose presence hasn't been confirmed yet among the Black Servants—Assassin."

He felt it was somewhat dangerous to trust Shirou Kotomine's words, but he wouldn't lie about something like this. And, of the Black Servants, the deceased Saber and the ones within the Fortress of Millennia, Lancer, Rider, Archer and Berserker, had already battled against some of the Red Servants at least once. Based on the quality of the golems they fought, Caster, who was presumed to be a golem-user, was also probably among them.

Only Assassin's presence hadn't been confirmed. Of course, with Assassin's class skill, [Presence Concealment], the possibility that the Servant was on standby in the Fortress of Millennia couldn't be discarded, but…

In any case, they had to obtain confirmation. If the serial killer was a Servant, he would have Saber fight them. Even if that wasn't the case, the serial killer was an enemy due to having killed the magi despatched by the Association. They should try to get rid of any future worries as much as possible.

"It's fine if it's a Servant… So, what do we do?"

"We'll wait until night. In the meantime, I intend to go look at the corpses of the dead magi at the morgue."

"Hmm. And me?"

"Of course I'd be grateful if you accompanied me. But it's daytime, so I won't force you. It's a waste, but if I judge that I'm in a dangerous situation, I'll immediately summon you with a Command Spell."

However, Shishigou didn't think he'd have to use a Command Spell anyway. All the incidents happened at night. Perhaps the serial killer was protecting the war's minimum rule of not acting during the day, or perhaps there was a reason why the culprit had to kill at night. Either way, the

chances of being attacked during the daytime were so low that he could ignore the danger. So he essentially intended to treat this as free time.

"Who would go to a gloomy place like a morgue? Now, what should I do…?"

Saber apparently decided to stroll around the streets. Fortunately, Sighișoara was one of Romania's tourist spots, with buildings that boasted of hundreds of years of history and were preserved even to this day. There was no way anyone would get tired of—no, wait.

After he parted with her and was in the midst of heading to the morgue, Shishigou realized a crucial point. She was a Servant, a person who had lived in the far past.

"Now that I think about it, there's no way she hasn't seen such things before."

Even if people said the buildings had a 'Middle Ages' look, she had lived in that very era.

Shishigou predicted that, at first, Saber would wander through the streets expecting to see new and curious things, but gradually notice and mutter to herself, "Huh, there's not much difference from the era I lived in?", and then immediately become displeased and kill time while sulking—

"It was so boring…"

Shishigou and Saber met back up when the sun started to set. With a truly disappointed expression, Saber voraciously ate a massive quantity of baked sweets she appeared to have bought at a street stall half out of despair.

"…I thought so."

"Even though I wanted to see skyscrapers, there weren't any at all. The buildings that tourists gathered around had nothing strange about them at all… Damn it, I wasted my time feeling out of place."

"…I thought so."

"After this, I can't calm down unless I fight a Servant! So, how did things go on your end?"

"Rejoice, Saber. I have good news for you. I checked the dead bodies, but they really were in a horrible state."

Shishigou said that happily, and Saber squinted at him suspiciously.

"What does that mean?"

"Some of them were attacked with edged tools and blunt weapons… or others with punches and kicks. There's evidence that some of the victims used guns or magecraft. And almost all of them had their hearts gouged out."

"Hearts?"

"The place where the spiritual core is located for a Servant, and the internal organ said to be the source of life for humans. They might have been eaten in a ritual in order to obtain prana."

Saber thought about it for a short while, and then muttered to herself.

"…Were they eaten raw?"

"Don't say such unpleasant things… I'd find it scarier if they were eaten cooked."

To eat the heart raw was to use it for a ritual, but to cook and then eat it meant the act was a hobby. Of the two, the people who did the latter were more terrifying.

"In any case, I hope that it's a Servant we're after. I won't forgive you if you're wrong."

"I'll face the Master. That guy is also completely breaking the universal rule of magi of hiding their mysteries…"

Articles in the newspapers were already showily declaring, "Jack the Ripper reborn in Romania", and the entire country was gripped with fear. No matter how Shishigou thought about it, he could only think that a magus who would leave this situation alone had gone completely insane.

Even though nighttime had only just descended in Sighișoara, both the tourists and local inhabitants were already taking refuge in the safety of their homes.

"Did you find anywhere suitable when you were wandering around?"

Shishigou nodded. The people who had become victims had at first been hoodlums and gangster, and it was conjectured that the serial killer had broken into the buildings where they gathered and massacred them. However, after that—just after Association magi had been despatched to Sighișoara as rear backup, it appeared that the killer's aim had narrowed down to only them.

In other words, it was fine to think that there was a high chance that the killer would aim for Shishigou Kairi next, as he was now the only magus in Sighișoara.

"Saber, just in case, change into your armor. The enemy is Assassin. You might not have time to change your clothes if you receive a surprise attack."

She nodded at his words and clad her entire body in her steel armor. Fortunately, due to the effect of the incidents, they were the only ones walking down the road at night. They might pass by vigilant policemen, but they could simply deceive them with suggestion magecraft then.

"All right… let's go."

Thus, the magus and Servant began boldly walking down the street, using themselves as bait.

***

"There really isn't anyone out at all."

Rikudou Reika sighed as she looked down at the dead streets with no sign of humans present from a third-story window. It was always like this here recently. When it became nighttime, the city became as still as death.

"**Master** (Mother), shouldn't we move to a different town soon?"

Reika's Servant—Assassin of Black pulled at her shirt sleeve.

"I suppose so. Next is Trifas, right?"

Assassin nodded her head. But then her expression immediately turned downcast.

"But, that might be a bit dangerous. Since all the others are still alive."

"The others?"

"The other Servants like us."

"…Yeah. Now that you mention it, there are others besides Jack. It'd be a bit scary to go where they are."

Reika commented in a carefree manner, and Assassin also agreed.

"Yeah. We are Assassin, after all. Surprise attacks are our specialty, but it's impossible for us to face multiple enemies. We would definitely die first."

Assassin, with the face of a very young girl, calmly spoke that cold fact.

"But they're trying to kill each other, right?"

"Yes. The magi and Servant have divided into the Red and Black factions and should be in the midst of fighting each other."

"Then for now, why don't we go over there while at the same time taking a wait-and-see approach? If there's a chance, you can go and eat, and if it's dangerous, we can run away."

Assassin of Black thought over Reika's suggestion for a short while. Although Reika and Assassin were connected through their contract, Reika was a complete amateur when it came to magecraft, so she could provide almost no prana. Therefore, Assassin had been supplying herself with prana by devouring the souls of humans.

Naturally, this method had heavy demerits for a Servant, but there were slight merits to it as well. Reika didn't emit any presence of magecraft, so the chances of being discovered by another Master were extremely low. If Assassin used [Presence Concealment] as well, Rikudou Reika would probably be overlooked as a completely ordinary human.

Most of all, Assassin wanted to confirm how many Servants that she couldn't kill herself currently remained.

"Yeah, we could go now. —But it seems another magus has come to this city."

After pondering whether to go to Trifas, the two of them came to a decision for the time being.

"Oh my, is that so? Then shall we make them your last meal in Sighișoara?"

"…Yeah, let's. But *Mother*, you can't come to watch today. It might be more dangerous than usual."

"All right. Then I'll wait here. Take care."

"Yeah. We're heading out. Hey, hey. When we come back, we want to eat hamburgers again… Is that okay?"

"Of course. I've already bought the ingredients, so I'll borrow the kitchen to make it."

Assassin was bashfully happy at those words, and then she jumped out from the third-story window. Reika waved her hand with a smile and watched her depart.

Now then. Reika didn't know when exactly Assassin would return, but in any case, she had to prepare a delicious meal for that darling girl—

***

There was no town as unique as Sighișoara in Romania or even all of Europe. This was referring to its 'unchanging' nature. It was a small town with a population of thirty thousand, but the

people who came to sightsee felt as if they had slipped back in time to the Middle Ages just by walking through the town's historical district, which was labelled a World Heritage Site.

If you walked through the extremely rough, stone-paved hill road, you would find private houses that looked exactly the same as they had in the sixteenth century lining the streets and even public squares where witch trials were once held.

Other sightseeing spots included the home in which Vlad III was born (it was now a restaurant), the town's landmark clock tower, and a church at the top of the mountain in the old city district. At any rate, the town was the most suitable sightseeing area for foreigners to experience the 'Europe of the past'.

And presently, Sighișoara was gripped by fear due to a serial killer. It was a ghastly situation where visiting tourists had been murdered one after another and all their corpses had their hearts gouged out.

There was no evidence besides the corpses left behind, and no link could be found between the victims at all. But only a select few people knew the truth. The victims were all magi—in other words, something extraordinarily 'abnormal' was occurring in Sighișoara.

Shishigou and Saber of Red had been walking for an hour now through the streets, lit faintly by sodium-vapor lamps, on edge all the while. Saber's armor clinked noisily, but fortunately there was no one around who questioned them. A drunken homeless man carrying a wine bottle in one hand gazed at Shishigou and Saber with an open-mouthed expression. Not even bothering to use suggestion magecraft, Shishigou waved his hand at him, and the man banged his head and started drinking again.

Although they encountered policemen several times, they were immediately driven away using Shishigou's suggestion magecraft. Even the policemen probably didn't want the duty of remaining on watch for a crazy killer. Shishigou was able to drive them away without even forcing them that much.

But more importantly, Saber was more serious now. Not long ago, she'd been complaining with "This is boring", "So dull", and "Are they here yet?" over and over again, but now she had gone silent.

"What's wrong, Saber?"

"…Sorry, please let me concentrate. I have a bad feeling here."

Shishigou's face tensed at her words. If she was taking such a vigilant attitude, then there was definitely a Servant nearby.

At some point, their pace slowed down and became cautious. They surveyed their surroundings—the dim glow of the streets lamps seemed to conversely make their vision fuzzier. A freezing gust passed through that seemed to lick at the nape of Shishigou's neck.

"…A mist is forming."

Just as Saber said, before they knew it, a mist broke out around the two of them. This would obstruct their vision more and more————no, wait.

"Mist…?"

Even though the air was clear just moments ago, could a mist so thick it obstructed their vision just suddenly appear? …Impossible.

Shishigou and Saber stopped walking at nearly the same time. Saber already had her sword out, and Shishigou had his hands on the holster of his favorite shotgun.

"This mist is…"

The instant that Shishigou tried to mutter something, the inside of his nose was struck by pain like scattering sparks. He reflexively coughed and covered his mouth.

"Master!?"

"It's poison! Don't breathe, Saber!"

Shishigou crouched down as he covered his mouth and nose. Even just breathing a little caused the inside of his nose to explode in pain and his vision started to falter.

"Hey, hang on, Master!"

Making an instant decision, Shishigou took off his jacket and used it to cover his mouth and nose. The jacket, made from the skin of a magical beast, was able to cancel most Single-Action spells. When he breathed through the jacket, the pain was mitigated slightly. It appeared that the mist really was created out of prana.

"…Damn it. For now, let's get out of this mist."

"Yeah, if you're able to run, that is! I'll pull you along, follow me!"

Saber held her sword in her right hand and tightly grasped Shishigou's hand in her left as she began to run. Fortunately, perhaps because her Magic Resistance rank was high, Saber seemed to receive nearly no damage from the mist and didn't appear to mind the worsening visibility at all. Her sharp [Instinct] made the mist no obstruction at all for her.

But Saber and Shishigou were both certain. Since this wasn't an ordinary mist, naturally something would come 'next'. The issue was just when it would happen… Even as she ran and tried to escape from the mist, Saber prudently estimated the timing when it would occur.

Perhaps because she'd been able to precisely choose their escape route, the mist gradually started to fade away.

—People always wish for relief. When they fell into a dangerous situation, no matter how much they calmly dealt with the situation, their minds would relax immediately after they escaped from it.

—For just a moment right after they escaped from the jaws of death that lay in wait for them, no matter what kind of person they were, there was an opening when they stopped to take a breather.

—Serial killers never overlooked that moment of relaxation. They would hold their blades, which had sipped the blood of countless people, and quietly creep up behind them.

"All right, we're out…!"

Saber and Shishigou succeeded in getting out of the mist. In that instant, the only thought in Shishigou's head was to breathe fresh air. Having escaped from the fear of death, his mind relaxed just slightly. From behind him, an assassin crept up to slit his throat—

But Saber, who was standing in front of Shishigou, swung down the sword in her right hand just as she spun around, and sent Shishigou rolling on the ground due to lightly brushing his feet.

There was a flash.

A shrill sound resounded on the stone-paved ground. Saber's slash had struck away the knife grasped in Assassin's hand.

"…Ah."

"—Sorry, but that guy's my Master. The one you'll be fighting is me."

When Shishigou turned around, there was someone standing still almost right behind him. He hadn't noticed—in spite of getting this close to him, he hadn't noticed at all.

And he was struck with amazement by one more thing.

The person standing behind Shishigou was a young girl. She looked two or three years younger than his own Servant, Saber of Red. She had short, and messy silver hair and ice-blue eyes,

which were widened slightly in surprise. She had several knife scabbards hanging along her waist, but she didn't have the vital skirt to cover her lower body. Together with the leather clothes on her upper body, she had a sensuous atmosphere like a prostitute despite her very young appearance.

"You slashed at us. How horrible."

Muttering that, she looked straight at Saber's face.

"—What do you mean, 'horrible'? A lowlife like you who devours souls despite being a Servant has no right to say that!"

Not bothering to hide her displeasure, Saber thrusted her sword before her in preparation. Assassin, not seeming to fear the sword, tilted her head and replied with an extremely innocent expression.

"There's nothing wrong with that… right?"

The next instant, Saber repelled a knife thrown at her face with her gauntlet. Assassin had thrown a knife with an extremely natural movement while speaking without the slightest visible quiver of her wrist.

The reason Saber was able to respond to the sudden surprise attack was due to her instincts and skill. But an opening was created the instant she blocked the knife with her gauntlet and Assassin jumped behind her. The mist was still wafting strongly in the air there and immediately masked her from sight.

"Wait here, Master!"

After saying that, Saber once more leapt into the mist. Breathing in the mist made her body feel somewhat heavier, but Saber judged that it wouldn't impede her at this level.

She strained her ears for the faintest sound and swung her sword according to her instincts. The same sound as earlier resounded—she had struck down a thrown scalpel.

"Wow. You're really good."

Saber clicked her tongue at the girl's voice. The voice could be heard from all directions and she couldn't pinpoint its origin at all.

"Spare me your prattle. What good are the words of a 'cleaner' like Assassin who isn't even a Heroic Spirit? No, you're not even a cleaner. You're just a killer, just a murderer!"

"Oh? How did you know?"

"What—?"

Saber's mind was frozen with shock for an instant.

"Our name is Jack the Ripper. Hey, hey, hey, hey, won't you tell us your name too?"

The voice whispered right in her ear. Saber immediately swung her sword in that direction, but she felt no resistance against her blade as she merely cut through mist. But right now, the fact that she had learned the enemy's true name was more important.

—It was an incident from a hundred and twenty years ago. The people of London in Great Britain had trembled in terror. The people *he* targeted were all prostitutes from the East End. The number of people he murdered was in fact only five. In spite of that, he was the world's first serial killer, who left behind many legends and mysteries before he disappeared.

Based from a signature written in a letter posted in the newspapers, people called him Jack the Ripper.

It was only a hundred and twenty years ago. From the viewpoint of other mysteries with firm concepts that were far more ancient, this Servant was probably the most fragile in this regard in this Great Holy Grail War.

King Arthur had gone out on many campaigns and earned many magnificent achievements. Mordred herself had etched her name into history as the Knight of Treachery. Other Servants were also generally the same. Though their eras and societies differed, they should have overcome many legendary battles and left their names behind in the memories of the people.

But—Saber adjusted her grip on the handle of her sword and focused her mind.

Why had someone like a murderer been elevated to a level where she could be summoned as a Servant?

…The only possible explanation was that it was because the murderer's career had been shrouded in too much mystery and filled the people with too much terror. People might cheer as they watched a hero fight. They might be filled with courage and vie with one another as they hoisted up their fists. But this girl was different.

She etched her name into the world with arbitrary, thorough and despairing slaughter. If there were those who believed in her, they were surely other murderers just like her.

Indeed, she was appropriate as Assassin. Without any sound or sign of her presence, she simply killed her target. There was no one else who specialized in killing Masters as much as her.

To Saber, this mist wasn't much of an obstruction. However, due to Assassin's class skill [Presence Concealment], she couldn't grasp her presence at all. Since Assassin's voice was resounding around Saber, she should definitely be nearby, but—

"Ah, just like we thought! You're a *woman*, aren't you?"

Saber involuntarily ground her teeth slightly at those words.

"In that case—"

"Yeah. In that case—"

"*Let's do it*."

—It sounded as if she were conversing with someone. An eerie slug-like feeling that Saber hadn't experienced in a long while slightly passed through her chest.

This was fear. An unknown assassin lurking in the darkness. She never fought head on, always using surprised attacks, always taking the initiative. If Saber mistakenly predicted her next move, it would instantly lead to her own death.

So—what should she do?

"…Hah. Don't underestimate me, you shitty brat!!"

An instant reply. Saber stored her helm into her armor as if tearing off the skin upon which the fear clung to her. At the same time as she exposed her noble-looking face, she raised the sword in her hand and shouted.

"…Crimson Lightning!"

"____"

If there was an eerie darkness, than she just needed to blow it away with her own light. She poured all her prana into her sword, making it spew crimson lightning around her.

The mist literally vanished—and Assassin looked at Saber with an open-mouthed expression.

"It's over, Assassin. If you're going to scream out to your heart's content, now's your chance. Once I behead you, you won't be able to scream anymore."

"We don't wanna. Our tummy is still empty."

Speaking like a child, she held a butcher knife in each of her hand.

"You should give up and run away," said Saber with a fearless smile while she timed the moment to activate [Prana Burst].

Since the mist had vanished, her body was no longer weighed down. So there should have been no way for Saber, a Servant of the strongest class, to fall behind the likes of a murderer that couldn't hide in the darkness.

Watching their fight from afar, Shishigou had the utmost faith regarding that point. However, there was just one factor that made him uneasy. After getting out of the mist, he had taken out a piece of equipment from his jacket pocket.

It was the wrist of a magical monkey cast in adipocere wax. In situations where he wasn't able to move from where he was, he used this wrist to quickly construct to a Bounded Field that warded people away. It wasn't a half-hearted piece of magecraft either. The wrist crawled around independently like a mouse, and as it did so it created a completely locked-out area as if cutting off that space from everything else.

He hadn't tried it out yet, but even if he were in an intersection in the streets of New York at night or of Shibuya in Tokyo, he was confident that he could completely clear people out of the area. Though there existed eyes besides those of people, such as cameras, in such downtown districts, so it wouldn't be effective in the first place.

—The source of his unease was…

…the fact that they were in the unfavorable emergency situation, as *someone had managed to break into* this space where everyone besides him and the two female Servants in front of him had cleared away.

His palm hurt as if it were being stabbed by needles. That was how Shishigou sensed that an intruder had penetrated his Bounded Field.

"Saber!"

His words exploded into the air as the critical situation continued to unfold. Saber of Red and Assassin of Black were both charging at each other.

Saber was aiming to swing her sword down from above and cut Assassin in half in a single stroke with the force of a surging wave. On the other hand, Assassin was challenging her to close-combat again with movements so smooth they were terribly eerie. Her target was the nape of Saber's neck, a vital point. If Saber's strike was a superhuman attack that transcended the domain of humans, then Assassin had abandoned humanity so thoroughly that she had reached the domain of inhuman beasts.

—I'll win.

The instant she leapt forward, Saber was certain of that. She had no doubt that her strike would deliver a fatal wound to Assassin. The timing, speed, power; everything was in perfect sync.

—But.

At the same time, Saber's mind was bothered by Shishigou's shout. There was definitely a reason for the shout just now. If not, he wouldn't have called out her name. When she had thought that far, she realized it with a chill.

She didn't know where. But she was definitely being aimed at.

A throw or shot from long distance. The enemy was probably Lancer or Archer. Either way, at this rate she would be killed…!

Her body moved before her logical thought caught up. She just slightly put the brakes on her intense forward charge and forcefully screwed her body around. This was all she could do now. Slanting her body, she looked at the clock tower that was one of this city's landmarks.

She gazed at it in amazement. Two figures stood at the pinnacle of the clock tower. Illuminated by the faint moonlight, the person she saw pointing a bow and arrow at her there was definitely a Servant—!

The next instant, a shock wave and a thunderous roar hit Saber's entire body.

***

The fired arrow hit just as planned. But the target hadn't moved as planned. Without lowering his bow, Archer loaded his next arrow.

"Did you succeed?"

Archer shook his head at the question of his Master, Fiore.

"No. Unfortunately, Saber dodged the attack just now. She really does deserve to be called a member of the strongest class."

"And Assassin—?"

"Assassin avoided a fatal blow as well. Though I did manage to inflict a wound on her."

Sighișoara's famous clock tower boasted of being the tallest building in the city, with a height of sixty-four meters, and, just as one could see nearly the entire town from atop it, the tower was visible from everywhere in town.

It consisted of a central spire surrounded by four smaller spires. Above even the tower's highest hallway, Archer and Fiore stood on an outcropping so small that it that couldn't even be called a thin foothold.

The reason Archer was able to calmly stand somewhere that normal people wouldn't be able to endure for even a few seconds was probably due to his innate sense of balance. It was nothing to be surprised about for someone of his caliber.

The problem was his Master, Fiore. Her legs were disabled due to the effect of her degenerated Magic Circuits. Normally she was incapable of standing, and the foothold wasn't wide enough to hold her wheelchair either. In spite of that, she was on that foothold. However, she wasn't standing.

Her feet were suspended in midair. Long metal arms were extending out from her back and supporting her body on the small foothold.

"—Master. It appears that Assassin of Black has decided to retreat."

"Then we'll move on to fight Saber of Red just as planned. Archer, please face Saber. I'll fight with her Master Shishigou Kairi."

If possible, she wished they could have killed both Assassin of Black and Saber of Red together with that last attack. If one were to ask which they prioritized between Assassin of Black and Saber of Red, the answer would naturally be Saber. Now that they had lost their faction's Saber, she was a Servant that they absolutely wanted to take down here and now.

"Master. Please don't overextend yourself."

"Yes… I know."

By Archer's judgement, Saber's Master Shishigou Kairi and his own Master Fiore were nearly even in ability. Shishigou was superior when it came to experience and Fiore was superior when it came to sense. The only remaining factor was how calmly either of them could deal with this battle situation.

Saber's angry gaze pierced Archer. Her exposed face was surprisingly young and beautiful. But Archer, having seen many heroes, could tell. She definitely had the disposition of a hero.

Feeling a sense of exaltation as if the bottom of his stomach was ablaze—Archer smiled bitterly. It appeared that he himself was still a green youth. Or perhaps it was due to being summoned in the form from his heyday. As he was now, Archer leaned toward recklessness so much that it surprised even him.

Saber exchanged a glance with her Master Shishigou for just an instant, and then immediately charged in Archer's direction. It wouldn't take her even ten seconds to reach the clock tower.

Fiore matched her and headed towards Shishigou while circumventing Saber's path.

Saber's gaze turned towards Fiore for an instant. Instantly, Archer fired his nocked arrow at her to deter her from doing anything to Fiore.

Saber cut down the arrow with a single stroke. That seemed to decide Saber's mind. Without glancing at Fiore any further, she charged straight at Archer—

***

Saber had needed five seconds to regain her footing after Archer's shot. But by the time those five seconds had passed, Assassin had already withdrawn.

She clicked her tongue—her regret over not killing Assassin and her hatred towards Archer for getting in the way made Saber's face twist in anger.

"Master. Assassin has run away, while Archer's over there. Who should I attack? I personally recommend Archer who's so full of himself on the clock tower."

Saber asked that question while pointing her sword at the clock tower, and Shishigou just scratched his head with a sigh. His answer was already decided for him. In addition, it'd be very difficult to chase after Assassin now that she had run away. Anyhow, they wouldn't be able to catch her by sight at all due to her [Presence Concealment] skill.

"…You seem pretty intent on fighting Archer yourself. Well, that's the correct decision. I'll take care of his Master."

"Sorry about this, Master. Then, I'm off to crush Archer."

Saber grinned happily. She could also tell with her eyes that Archer was nocking his next arrow. Her normal full-throttle speed wouldn't be enough to reach him in time. However—

Saber had the [Prana Burst] skill. By taking off her Noble Phantasm helm, she could clad her body in prana even further and could explosively accelerate herself by instantly releasing it all in a jet burst.

"All right… Saber, go and get him!"

"Aye!!"

The instant after she yelled out her agreement to Shishigou, she disappeared in a flash. She had taken a single, powerful step forward. She was like a human-shaped cannonball. She flew towards where that distant bowman should be.

Archer didn't move. Saber glanced at Archer's Master as she headed towards Shishigou while circumventing around Saber. However, an arrow flew towards Saber to prevent her from touching the female Master.

As she cut the arrow with her sword, Saber smiled.

—You don't need to worry, Archer. The one I want to crush is you.

Archer's Master was going to face Saber's own Master, Shishigou. He wouldn't lose before her. She felt a little surprised when she realized that she believed that. She had never trusted those known as magi before now. She had thought of magi as all being shut-ins with extremely twisted personalities. No, in reality, the magi that she had met until now were generally like that.

But there were also the sort of magi that get along well with her. The type that was foolhardy and reckless, thinking 90% on attack and 10% on defense.

Speaking of which, the catalyst that summoned her was a fragment from the Round Table. In other words, it wouldn't have been strange for any of the other Knights of the Round Table—like Lancelot, who slighted her father, or Gawain, that annoying honor student—to have been summoned instead.

And yet, the one who was summoned was her. She considered the meaning of that. She thought that, at some point, she would have to properly think it over. In order to obtain the Holy Grail for herself.

At that point, Saber stopped her extraneous thoughts. She was heading for the sixty-meter-tall clock tower. She only needed twelve steps to reach it. Instead of ascending it with both her hands and feet, she dashed straight up the 90-degree-angle outer wall with just her two feet.

Archer was already right before her. She could see not only his form, but even his expression. He was a man of delicate features clad in leather armor. Indeed, the style of his appearance was truly that of a bowman. But now that she had gotten this close, there was no longer anything that Archer could do.

Archery was the most superior when it came to long-range sniping. Even when compared to modern guns, it still had a huge advantage due to being able to shoot almost completely silently. Of course, in order to hit the target with an arrow, one requires unimaginably harsh training and innate talent. But there was no way a Heroic Spirit summoned as Archer would lack those. So the Archer class was nearly invincible as long as it remained at long range from the enemy.

But if there was a Servant fast enough to close him from long range to close range, the situation would be completely overturned.

A bowman also naturally has several weak points. Firstly, it was nearly impossible to shoot consecutively. Secondly, his location was easily exposed from the path of his arrows. Thirdly, a bow was extremely fragile at close range.

It was natural for Saber to feel confident of her victory. When the enemy had gotten so close, there was nothing a bowman could do—that's how it should have been.

Completely unfazed by Saber's violent charge, Archer smoothly loaded his next arrow.

The nocked arrow was shot at Saber's face as she came at him right from below, but she flicked it away with her sword held in both her hands.

"I got you, Archer...!!"

There was no time for him to nock another arrow. Just like with Assassin earlier, Saber was certain that she would kill him in a single strike.

But Archer was a Heroic Spirit with a long history of experience as a warrior. At that precise moment, he did something so unexpected that it surpassed even Saber's instincts. Without hesitation—he threw himself off from the small and unreliable foothold into the air.

As Saber was paralyzed in shock, Archer nocked another arrow and fired it at Saber even as he fell towards the ground below. His target was naturally her chest, which should be thinly armored. However, an arrow shot by Archer—Chiron of the Sagittarius—would definitely kill everything in its path.

The arrow, clad in the light of the stars, forcibly smashed through Saber's armor. Something cold crept into her shoulder, and flashes of dizzying pain ran through her entire body one after another. But, probably thanks to her heavy armor, the arrow that had been aimed at her chest seemed to have been deflected and pierced her shoulder instead.

But such a thing wasn't comforting at all for Saber, who had been certain of her victory.

"You, bastard……!!"

Saber managed to drown out the intense pain, spreading like ripples from her shoulder to the rest of her body, with just her anger. Without hesitation, she went into a bullet dive straight at the still-falling Archer using [Prana Burst]—!

She's like a shooting star, Archer thought. She wasn't graceful at all, but she was excessively strong and excessively violent, and so she possessed an enchanting light.

Indeed, Saber was a magnificent Heroic Spirit. She had to have a strong will to launch a counterattack immediately upon receiving his attack, ignoring the pain and impact from it.

In just several fractions of a second—Saber would probably cut him down this time beneath her blade the moment he landed on the ground. Now then, what should he do to prevent that?

He couldn't use his archery. No matter how fast his arrows were, he was already at a disadvantage against a sword that would finish its motion just by being swung down. He had no

sword or lance, he couldn't use his bow, he had no mount, there was no way he could go mad and rampage, and he couldn't stop this course of events with magecraft or dirks.

—In that case. He had no choice but to fight with his final remaining weapon.

His sixty-meter fall, and his landing—just before it came to an end, he vigorously struck the ground with one leg and slightly shifted his body to the side.

He extended both his arms. The roaring Saber noticed his inexplicable action, but she didn't have the time to take it into consideration.

With her sword brandished to strike combined with her explosive accelerated speed due to [Prana Burst] and with her being in her normal state excluding the release of her Noble Phantasm, there was no winning blow as perfect as this.

However, against what would definitely deal a fatal wound if it hit, Archer did something dreadful—or rather, something 'crazy' like Saber herself would do.

He extended both arms, and before the charging Saber could swing down her sword, he coiled his arms around her. The instant her wrists were seized in a hold, her senses rang out in alarm. Forcefully halting her slash as it bit into his collarbone, Archer didn't negate the momentum of her charge but instead cleverly transferred her body weight and—

A throwing technique…!?

The instant that Saber realized what he was doing, she was flung through the air upside down. It was similar to a one-armed shoulder throw in judo, but the way it immobilized the joints of her wrists was completely merciless.

Archer… Chiron was the greatest sage among the centaurs and received various teachings from the gods such as learning medicine and music from the sun god Apollo and hunting from the goddess Artemis. And so, young and immature heroes gathered around him and learned various teachings and fighting techniques under his wing.

The sword, lance, and bow—besides those, Archer had also acquired techniques for fighting bare-handed as a matter of course. They consisted of perfect hand-to-hand combat techniques that combined boxing and wrestling.

all strength
That fighting style was Pankration—the world's oldest mixed martial arts spoken of in Ancient Greek tales.

"Gah…!!"

Hitting the deadly weapon known as the ground, Saber's eyes widened as she experienced an impact that seemed to make her very guts reverberate. Her entire body froze for just a few seconds if she was tied down with chains. It was an extremely lethal situation for her—however, despite the fact that Saber had fallen down, Archer didn't finish her off; instead, he fell down to his knees in anguish. The wound from the blade that had bit into his shoulder, even if it wasn't a fatal wound, was extremely close to being so.

Normally, there was no strength behind the part of the blade close to the handle, so Archer had judged that it would probably only be strong enough to cut his leather armor. But he had underestimated it too much. In spite of receiving Saber's strike under most likely the very best of conditions possible, the wound on his collarbone was too deep.

Most likely, his right shoulder wouldn't move until it was mended with healing magecraft. In other words, he couldn't use his bow until then. Archer smiled bitterly. He had intended to corner her, but he ended up being cornered instead. The decisive chance he had received in return had been reversed into a fatal situation for him.

He came to a decision without hesitation. He could not think of a way to deliver a final blow to Saber in this situation no matter how he moved or fought. If he effectively used the slightly less than three seconds it would take until Saber got back up, withdrawal was probably the best plan here.

Archer decided to report the situation to Fiore who was fighting a fierce battle of her own and recommend retreating.

***

Necromancers start their training by first staring at their own death. They must hypnotize themselves and see their flesh decompose many, many times. Their reflection in the mirror rots away disgustingly before their eyes—and they get used to it. They stare at death, carry death, and learn that life is always accompanied by death.

And necromancy is a craft that controls death.

Shishigou Kairi waited for the girl to arrive while smoking a cigarette. He didn't set up any detection or protective Bounded Fields, leaving himself far too defenseless.

But then, Shishigou knew quite well that there was no meaning in such things if the one he was going to face was her. Any Bounded Fields he made at this point would simply be a waste of his prana and tools.

Shishigou noticed the wind change direction slightly, and flicked away his still-lit cigarette.

He looked up at the sky above and called out to the young girl suspended in the air there.

"Now then. You don't mind if we skip introducing ourselves, do you?"

The man smirked, and the girl smiled in turn.

In a somewhat narrow alleyway caught between two buildings, Fiore Forvedge Yggdmillennia had stabbed the [arms] sprouting from her back into the walls of the buildings. The arms gave off the impression of being smooth yet hard, and were similar to insect legs—that was what Shishigou thought.

"…Very well. There's no way either of us doesn't know each other's names. However, may I give a warning just in case?"

"Go ahead."

"—Leave now, necromancer. All this far and wide land belongs to us Yggdmillennia. I will overlook your insolent trespassing should you leave. If you ignore this warning, your folly will be repaid with compensation equivalent to death."

"Heh… So, do you think I'll obey that?"

In response to Shishigou's words, Fiore spoke with a satisfied smile.

"No. But if I declare that first, I wouldn't be able to resolve myself inside."

I see, Shishigou thought with a wry smile. To put it another way, since she had warned him—she wouldn't hesitate to kill him now.

And of course, Shishigou had no intention of obeying such a warning. His answer was to reach his hand for his shotgun. At that instant, the density of prana in the surrounding area thickened.

There was no more room for idle talk between them. Fiore knew that Shishigou Kairi was a freelance magus and that he surpassed her in terms of battle experience. Shishigou knew that Fiore Forvedge Yggdmillennia was a prodigy who bore the next era of the Yggdmillennia clan on her shoulders.

—The magecraft this person uses is necromancy. However, his magecraft isn't as simple as turning corpses into ghouls and using them as slaves. For example, the small firearm he's holding…

Euryphis

—The magecraft this young lady uses are spiritual evocation and human engineering… If I remember right, her Mystic Code is called the Bronze-Link Manipulator.

The frozen atmosphere between the two of them was blown away by the metal lid of a garbage can nearby. Perhaps blown by the wind, it fell down noisily and caused the tension between them to explode. Shishigou pulled out his sawed-off shotgun in a single smooth motion and Fiore whirled down from the sky fiercely and resolutely.

He pulled the trigger—and a bullet manufactured from a processed finger cut off from a magus sniffed out the presence of a magus and rushed out to hit her right in the head.

"—Tin Arm of Protection (Jupiter), intercept."

A fatal magic bullet that targeted the enemy's head without mistake and could not be dodged. That bullet, which wouldn't stop until it planted itself in the head of the enemy, was plucked away without hesitation by the arms sprouting from Fiore's back.

Shishigou's shock at this lasted for only an instant. Moving quickly to retreat, he hid himself on the other side of a car parked along the street. The two arms sprouting out from Fiore's back each split into two. With now four [arms] in total, two of them acted as substitute legs for her by stabbing themselves into the stone pavement. And the other two arms opened their jaws straight at Shishigou like menacing insects.

"—Iron Arm of War (Mars), shoot."

With sounds similar to gunfire, [bullets of light] shot out from those openings. Those shots, which had force behind them equal to bullets, pulverized the stone pavement at Shishigou's feet.

"Ah, damn it. So those arms can do anything, huh…!"

While pigeonholing himself, Shishigou used the car as a shield and withstood the machine gun-like strafing fire of cursed bullets. He threw out his shotgun's empty cartridge and reloaded with a bullet from his waist pocket.

After shooting some restraining fire, he took out a processed owl eyeball and tossed it out through an opening in the car. It linked with the sight in his right eye, allowing him to survey the girl. First, he looked once more at the Mystic Code she wore.

According to the profile he'd obtained beforehand, she should be burdened with the handicap of being unable to move her legs due to a defect of her Magic Circuits that was a physical peculiarity of hers.

However, with that Mystic Code, such a thing was no problem. To her, that Mystic Code was exceedingly excellent legs in and of itself. Since it was able to pluck away a fired bullet, even if it was at subsonic speeds, it surpassed other Mystic Codes in terms of precise movement.

—The reaction speed of its autonomous defense was nearly perfect as well. Most likely, it was equal to that of the Cerebrospinal Volumen Hydrargyrum Fluid of the Moon Spirit, the autonomous-type maid golem that accompanied the 'young mistress' of the El Melloi.

However, due to the difference in composition between mercury and metal arms, the arms would probably have trouble dealing with something like a claymore mine that attacks the entire surrounding area instead of a single point.

"…In other words, I'll have to use this."

Shishigou took out the heart of a magus from the inside pocket of his jacket. This internal organ, which had the teeth and nails of magi embedded inside it, was quite suitable as an anti-magus weapon. The teeth and nails it scattered upon detonation were charged with prana soaked in grudges and exerted an effect similar to a kind of [Gandr] when they hit a person's body. However, their effect was much stronger than that simple curse, perhaps because they were made from the body parts of the dead.

Put simply, when the teeth and nails penetrated a person's skin, their skin would decompose and melt away.

He pulled out the heart's muscle fiber like a pin, and the halted heart instantly began beating and pulsing. He confirmed her location with the owl eye. While remaining hidden behind the car, Shishigou used a bit of sudden airflow manipulation and threw the hand grenade heart at the perfect spot.

"Kuh——!!"

If Shishigou had made one mistake, it was using this hand grenade in the skirmish against the homunculi before, thereby showing it to Fiore and the others. Having collected and examined the corpses of the homunculi and then hypothesized the power and effect of the grenade from their decomposed state, she knew that this attack would be fatal.

"—Lead Arm Saturn of Roaring, crush!"

The metal arm that acted as her right leg seemed to turn itself flat like a spatula and squashed the rolling heart from above. The teeth and nails that should have been scattered into the surroundings with a destructive blast were pushed into the ground, unable to hurt Fiore's body.

But the fact that Shishigou had managed to gain even a little bit of time was important. Getting into the car that he was using as a shield, he pulled out a hidden spare key from the driver seat's sun visor and quickly started up the engine.

The instant that Fiore frantically turned around at the noisy sound of the engine—he pressed down on the accelerator and the car ran her over from the front with a violent charge.

—Geez! This person is so reckless and absurd!

Even as the car hood coiled around her, Fiore was not significantly injured. Her four artificial arms had instantly protected her.

However, at this rate she would definitely be crushed against a wall or something else. She dug her artificial arms into the car hood and pulled her body up. Her eyes met Shishigou's in the driver's seat—and then he turned the handle sharply to the left in order to shake her off.

But two of Fiore's arms pierced into the car hood and completely fixed her body in place. Furthermore, she used her two remaining arms to tear off the car's front glass along with its roof.

Shishigou was now defenseless, but he had gotten his sawed-off shotgun in his hand without her noticing. He smiled in satisfaction—and hit the brake. After having been hit by the car hood, Fiore was blown off this time by the sudden recoil.

Her four artificial arms detected that she was in a dangerous situation and stabbed into the stone pavement to act as a cushion. Instantly, Fiore understood. In this state, she couldn't intercept his attack with her artificial arms.

In the car's driver's seat, Shishigou pulled out his shotgun. She shuddered as she felt the presence of death—and then he pulled the trigger and fired a magic bullet at subsonic speed. Fiore couldn't think of any countermeasures.

Oh n...!?

And then, the silhouette of an animal quickly cut in before her.

"What!?"

The magic bullet smashed through the animal's brain, ending its mission. As Fiore was frozen in astonishment, someone hidden behind a nearby building called out.

"Nee-san, don't just stand there in shock!"

"Ah. R-Right!"

Fiore frantically stood up. Her artificial arms had already regained their flawless ready postures to protect her. She ordered her arms to release strafing fire with bullets of light all at once in order to blow way the car.

Clicking his tongue, Shishigou went back to hiding behind the car. He tried to figure out the identity of the person who had shouted just a moment ago.

"Nee-san, Nee-san, Nee-san… are you Caules Forvedge Yggdmillennia!?"

"That's right!" responded Caules with a shout from behind the building.

Things have gotten troublesome, Shishigou thought. Magi had to create a situation as advantageous as possible if a battle should increase beyond just one-on-one between them. Trying to fight alone against two magi was pure folly.

According to the profile Shishigou was given before the war started, this younger brother was so inferior when it came to magecraft that he couldn't even be compared to his older sister, but that just made fighting both of them all the more foolish. Being inferior in magecraft did not mean that he was weak when it came to fighting as well.

Rather, Shishigou knew well that the type of magi who would [do anything] in order to compensate for their inferior magecraft were far more formidable enemies. In the first place, this was not a battle of magecraft, but a war—a fight to kill each other. No matter how much you excelled in magecraft, if you died, you lost.

"Come out and show your face! How about introducing yourself fair and square like a magus!?"

In response to Shishigou's provocation, Caules replied honestly.

"I refuse! Do self-introductions elsewhere, you muscle-headed daruma!"

What's up with that blunt refusal?—Shishigou thought. In a complete reversal from earlier, he had fallen into checkmate. Honestly, he had no confidence that he could beat her in close combat. No matter how much he had trained himself as a human being, he couldn't do anything against those fearsome artificial arms—the Bronze-Link Manipulator. In addition, Caules was his biggest obstacle. Shishigou couldn't concentrate on fighting her one-on-one. Could he be watchful of Caules while fighting Fiore? Rejected; that was impossible.

…In other words, he needed something that would be sufficient to kill Fiore in a single strike.

"There's no way I can die while keeping my treasure unused."

He carefully took *it* out from his inside pocket. It was a knife with a thin blade that was hard to call practical in shape and design. This weapon did not automatically aim for the head like the finger of a magus that he had used earlier. But, this would kill the enemy if it hit. No, *it would kill if it even touched someone*.

When Shishigou accepted the request to participate in this Great Holy Gail War, he had asked for a juvenile hydra preserved in formalin as prior compensation. He had used each of the nine heads of the hydra to create either weapons or supplemental tools. This was an enchanted poisonous Mystic Code that should probably be kept in reserve for when he fought as a magus.

But—he was stuck in a stalemate no matter what he did. Just before he resolved himself and entrusted himself to a make-or-break gamble—the strafing fire suddenly stopped.

"…?"

Finding it odd, he secretly peeked at Fiore to see her condition. With a calm expression you wouldn't expect to see in the midst of battle, she lightly nodded. And then, she spoke to Shishigou.

"It seems we must end things here."

"I'm not done yet!"

Shishigou shouted that while tightly gripping his knife. But Fiore shook her head and rejected that with a gentle gesture. When he saw her do that, Shishigou knew that he had lost the chance to use his trump card.

"I'll be waiting in our fortress in Trifas for our next encounter. Shishigou-sama, I'll settle my battle with you next time."

Fiore said that and then quickly retreated. Her behavior was rather splendid, and not even a fragment of her desire to kill him here remained.

Shishigou quickly gave up on pursuing her. It was a self-evident truth that the pursuer had the advantage in battle, but it didn't cancel out the disadvantage of numbers. The advantage of pursuing and the disadvantage of numbers. There was no need to weight them on a scale to choose which option he should take.

"…Did something happen to her Servant?"

In that case, this battle couldn't even be called a draw. Sighing, Shishigou took out a cigarette from his inside pocket as he decided to wait here until Saber returned.

A cigarette after a battle was normally reputed to taste good, but—

"No good, this really tastes bad."

Grimacing, Shishigou savored the taste of the world's transience with his lungs.

***

Fiore agreed to Archer's suggestion. It appeared that the other battle had also reached a stalemate.

'Then, let's join up at the designated location. Our intention was reconnaissance from the start. There's no need to obsess over settling things here and now.'

'Understood. Thank you, Master.'

By the time Saber managed to stand up, Archer had widened the distance between them sufficiently enough for him to escape.

"Are you running away, Archer!?"

Watching him move away, Saber shouted without hiding her anger.

"Yes, since, at this rate, I'll be defeated first. Let's consider this match as a draw due to mutual injuries."

After saying those final words, Archer smoothly disappeared into the darkness of a back alley. Even though it wasn't at the same level as Assassin's [Presence Concealment], it appeared that he possessed knowledge of techniques for making oneself disappear as well.

For an instant, Saber wavered over chasing after him—right now, he couldn't use his bow. She was confident that she could definitely cut him down if she caught up with him. However, the issue was whether or not she'd catch up to him. Additionally, she couldn't be certain that he wasn't hiding [something] like the throwing technique he had used earlier.

Of course he had humiliated her. So humiliated that even tearing him apart wouldn't satisfy her. But she endured it.

"…Now then, I wonder how Master is doing?"

She wasn't that worried. Should her Master fall into a critical situation, Saber would immediately be informed through the Command Spells. If he was just about to fall into such a situation, he would probably call her back to him using a Command Spell.

After standing up and walking for ten minutes, she found Shishigou looking languid as he leaned against a historic building that had been magnificently destroyed.

"So Archer retreated, huh."

Shishigou had no conspicuous wounds that were worth mentioning. Some blood flowed from his face and abdomen, but they were probably just scratches.

"Pretty much."

"So our first battle was a draw. Saber, how did you find a battle between Servants?"

Without replying, Saber merely looked up at the sky silently. Why was it that she found the cold blue moonlight so dazzling—?

Shishigou smiled and nodded as if he understood.

"It appears we've both tasted the thrill of the Holy Grail War to our hearts' content."

"Muh. I didn't say anything."

"I can tell that much from your face. Now then, assuming that Assassin has retreated, chasing after her would be difficult. She can't remain confined to Sighișoara forever either… Since Archer shot at her, it looks like she's not working with the Black faction, so there will probably be other chances to kill her."

Or she might be killed by another Servant as well. Most likely, a third party had killed the original Master and taken Assassin for themselves. Did they intend to conduct themselves skillfully and get their hands on the Holy Grail? Or—based on these serial killings, maybe they weren't thinking of anything.

Shishigou hoped it was the former case. That would be fine then, since they were fighting with reasoning behind their actions. But, if they were completely unconcerned with everything and were killing just because they wanted to—Assassin of Black and her Master would definitely become the most difficult enemies in the Great Holy Grail War.

However, just as Fiore had said, not just Trifas, but all of Romania should be under the control of Yggdmillennia. If not, the title of Second Owner landlord would weep.

"So, we'll be going back to Trifas, Saber."

"Aye… But, how are we going to get back? The bus we took to get here won't be passing through anymore at this time."

"Well, naturally—we're going to borrow one of these."

Shishigou briskly walked out onto the main street, smashed the glass window of a parked car and unlocked its door. By the way, he had no intention of returning it, so he was basically stealing it.

"Come on, get in."

"…Please avoid us having to drop out from the Great Holy Grail War due to getting caught by the police, Master."

Saber sighed as if amazed by her Master's actions.

***

When Assassin of Black, with her right arm hanging torn and limp, returned to the place she used as her dwelling, an hour had passed since she left.

"…It hurts."

With teary eyes, she showed her right hand to her Master, Rikudou Reika. Even the bone in her hand was visible in the cut cross-section, and her muscle fibers were torn to shreds. If she were a normal human, she wouldn't be able to use her hand ever again.

"Oh my!"

With a pale face, Reika frantically tried to search for a first-aid kit, but soon realized that there was no point. Assassin was a Servant who was not of this world. There was no point in applying medical treatment without magecraft. And as an ordinary human, Reika couldn't use magecraft.

She was helplessly limited to binding the wound with a clean handkerchief. There was nothing else she could do.

"Does it still hurt?"

Reika asked that uneasily, but Assassin shook her head and smiled as if to tell her not to worry.

"No… it's fine now. More importantly, *Mother*, we're hungry."

"All right. Just wait a bit. I'll go reheat your hamburger right now."

Since Assassin couldn't use her right arm, Reika decided to cut up the reheated hamburger with a fork and feed Assassin piece by piece.

After pestering Reika for the hamburger, Assassin opened her mouth like a small bird. Seeming to have forgotten about her right hand, she smiled happily from the bottom of her heart.

"Does it taste good?"

"Yeah!"

Thank goodness, thought Reika with relief, but when her thoughts turned to Assassin's right hand, her expression turned dark.

"Then, Jack. Just how did you get that injury?"

"Ah, yeah. We fought a Servant."

"Oh my… Servants are people like Jack, right?"

Assassin nodded. Reika had learned about the Holy Grail War in her own way from Jack, and she was able to understand enough to know that the enemies she challenged were considerably strong.

"Did you lose?"

"No… Someone else barged in. They were really cowardly, attacking while we were in the middle of fighting."

"Yeah. Everyone is thinking of acting all sneaky and cunning because it's a war. That's not good, right?"

"Right~," repeated Assassin with a smile. Then, while continuing to feed her the hamburger, Reika asked a question.

"Hey, Jack. What should we do about that?"

"Our right hand?"

"Yeah. It's painful to see your pretty hand like that."

"Ehehe… yeah. A [meal] would probably be the best cure."

Assassin replied while smiling in embarrassment. Reika had a contract with Assassin, but she couldn't supply prana to her. So naturally, Assassin had to rely on [eating] to supply herself with prana.

"Yeah, so how about eating the heart of the last Mister Magus?"

"Yeah, let's do that."

Reika took out a dark red heart wrapped in film on a white plate from the refrigerator. Unable to wait, Assassin plucked it out of the wrapping film and swallowed it in a single gulp.

The heart of a magus was far richer in prana than that of an ordinary human. Having replenished her depleted prana supply, Assassin felt herself become revitalized. Her town-up right hand was also already regenerating.

"Phew. What a relief."

"Yeah… But we're out of hearts now. *Mother*, what should we do?"

"Hmm, if we stay here, you might get attacked again. Also, the police have started to get noisy. Shall we try heading straight to Trifas next?"

Assassin folded her arms and started to hum to herself in thought… Saber was a formidable enemy, but based on the nature of the Holy Grail War, there wouldn't be many Servants stronger than that one. Of course, if Saber used her Noble Phantasm, Assassin's defeat would probably be certain. But Assassin had another certain kill Noble Phantasm of her own, and she hadn't used it in this battle.

Saber would probably run at and scatter the other Servants with her strength, but there was no way she'd be able to avoid using her Noble Phantasm at some point. If Assassin aimed for that moment—she'd be able to *eat* her.

"Hmm… yeah. Let's try going there."

"Okay. You're also tired, so let's leave after taking a nap. Okay, Jack?"

"Yeah!"

With light footsteps, Assassin jumped onto the bed, and then tore off the sheets. She rolled herself within them into a ball like a bagworm.

"Oh my."

Smiling, Reika piled the dishes and brought them to the kitchen. They would be immediately departing when they got up, but it was proper manners to tidy up before they left.

Although, since the men who had lived in this house had been dissected after having their hearts gouged out a short time ago and were now buried underground, there would never again be an opportunity for those dishes to be used.

"*Mother*, hurry up!"

Bunched up like a bagworm on top of the bed, Assassin kicked her legs about. While saying "Yes, yes" with a wry smile, Reika quickly finished washing the dishes and headed over to the bed.

The instant Reika lay down on the bed after taking off her clothes, Assassin covered her with the sheets wrapped around herself. Smiling innocently, Assassin hugged Reika's naked body and buried her face in her abdomen.

"M—o—th—er."

She murmured in a somehow slow, frightened manner. Reika embraced her closely and patted her head to comfort her.

"There, there."

Assassin behaved like a spoiled child, but Reika didn't find that strange. She didn't know about the Holy Grail War, Masters and Servants. Servants were Heroic Spirits, elevated due to the belief of the people, and were always summoned in the form of their heyday.

So there were hardly any that were summoned as children. Assassin of Black—Jack the Ripper wasn't like this because of a failure of the mind or soul, but was a genuine child.

…In the first place, Jack wasn't a [human] when she was alive.

In 1888, there were tens of thousands of prostitutes in London. The abortion methods back then were too unskilled and rough, and the children who should have been born were treated like trash. Their corpses were discarded into the river that flowed through the East End district where the prostitutes lived, and their hatred and grudges accumulated in the stagnant river.

The grudges of the tens of thousands of children who were denied even the right to be born gradually started to take human form. Eventually, a very young girl who couldn't even be called a prostitute wandered the streets of East End without knowing why. Why she was born, why she was sad, why she was cold—she didn't know anything. She didn't know, but she at least understood that she wanted something.

In such a state, she happened to meet a woman.

When she walked towards the woman and unconsciously called out [Mother], Jack was terribly abused. Getting abused was hard, painful and only left her sad. So she *killed the woman*.

Killing her was unexpectedly easy. The organs she took out of her after dismembering her were warm, as if they were a sign of love.

The next day, there was a huge ruckus when the woman's corpse was discovered.

She killed a second woman and then a third. And as she did so, she was given a name by the people.

Jack the Ripper—it made her happy. Because she hadn't known her own name either until then.

When rumors went around saying that 'Jack must be a doctor based on his dissection technique', she was delighted. The people she hated the most in this world were doctors—because they were the ones who kept killing children like her.

After killing several prostitutes, she then died. It wasn't due to any significant reason. A certain magus merely noticed that the bizarre murders were crimes done by a demonic being and promptly dealt with her.

After that, the murders stopped and Jack the Ripper disappeared into the darkness… But his murders were too bizarre, too incomprehensible, and too mysterious.

Born due to the fear that persisted even after her death, a serial killer Anti-Heroic Spirit—that was who this girl was.

While Reika repeatedly sang a lullaby several times, Jack seemed to have completely fallen asleep. Seeing that, Rikudou Reika also felt relieved and closed her eyes.

Rikudou Reika had been offered as a sacrifice for a Servant summoning ritual by an Yggdmillennia magus, Sagara Hyouma, but instead became a Master due to Assassin's betrayal of him. Until that time, she had simply lived by drifting through life aimlessly.

No, she might be doing so now as well. She might be just going with the flow of this unrealistic situation and vaguely seeking the Holy Grail. She wanted to be happy. That was the only reason she sought the Grail. But she should be able to find plenty of ways to accomplish that just by living. So why had she refused that simple life and purposefully agreed to take part in a war… and even kept killing people to use as nourishment?

"It's probably because I was bored."

What a horrible woman I am, she thought in self-mockery. But she had no intention to stop killing. Because it was absolutely necessary as food for the girl sleeping before her eyes. Because it was necessary in order to live.

To Reika, Jack was her own child. So she rejected every single ethical view. If it was for the sake of her child, a mother would gladly become the demon Yaksa.
Hariti

***

Sieg was surprised at how unexpectedly light the girl he carried on his back was, but he was also surprised at her current state of dress. Having released her armor, she was now dressed in civilian clothes. As expected, it would be too suspicious for her to go into town wearing that battle outfit.

"…Ah, this is so embarrassing."

"Don't worry about it. It can't be helped considering your circumstances."

Sieg said that as he vigorously stepped on the ground. If what she had confessed about being [summoned by possessing a human] was true, then it was understandable that she would collapse.

"In other words, you have the physical abilities of a Servant, but since you're linked to physical human body through the realm of the unconscious, you have to carry on your life as a human as well."

"That's how it is. Moreover, I seem to use up an excessive amount of calories while I act as a Servant."

"That's really inconvenient…"

Even if she covered her normal human body with a shell, what she did was still no different from overusing and abusing it. She was able to endure this unimaginable situation by coating different parts such as her nerves and muscle tissue, but she couldn't avoid the fervent consumption of calories that accompanied that method.

Of course, she wouldn't die from it. She wouldn't, but—

"I didn't think an empty stomach would be this painful. Umm, I even thought I'd be fine with munching on tree roots if it meant eating soon, but what should I do?"

Her tone conveyed that she was quite serious. Sieg replied while speeding up his feet somewhat

"…Please endure it just a little longer."

I'm not sure eating tree roots is such a good idea, Sieg thought, but Ruler merely feebly responded with "Yes…" to his words. At this rate, she would probably start munching on tree roots within less than thirty minutes if she had nothing else to eat.

Dawn had already come, and they started to see early rising villagers every here and there. Sieg rushed from the mountain to approach the nearest farmer and asked an old man whether there was a shop that supplied food in this village.

"Did your friend collapse?"

Seeming to take a break from his early morning manual labor, the man asked that in a worried tone while wiping the sweat from his neck with a towel.

"No, it seems she's unable to take even a single step due to an empty stomach."

"That's not good… I was thinking of eating breakfast right about now, but would you like to accompany me?"

"…Thank you. Then I'll accept your kindness without reserve."

Sieg had considered using suggestion magecraft if push came to shove, but since the conversation had gone unexpectedly well, he couldn't find the timing to do so at all. The old man immediately returned to his house, so Sieg also followed after him.

"Uu. What a nice smell…"

Having fainted earlier, Jeanne woke up. Sieg sat her down from his shoulder onto a chair in the dining room. The old man immediately placed a plate and spoon in front of her. It was a dish of thick reddish-brown porridge.

"This is…"

"This is real kasha made from buckwheat. Well, try eating it."

Seeming to gasp, Ruler scooped up some porridge with her spoon and brought it to her mouth. Immediately after, she seemed to quickly come back to life, and then ate up the porridge in the blink of an eye, requesting seconds with tears in her eyes.

Helplessly Sieg heled out some more from next to her, and she ate up that portion almost immediately as well.

"You're a big eater, aren't you?"

"Y-Yes! No, err, that is… I'm sorry."

With her stomach settled down, she seemed to put energy into thinking again. Her cheeks turned bright red, and she bowed her head deeply in apology.

"No, no, go ahead and eat more. You too, young man."

He held out another set of plates to Sieg and Ruler. While Sieg hesitated, Ruler decided to happily presume upon the old man's good will.

The old man said his name was Serge. He told them how he had been born in this village, raised his son here, seen the boy off when he left, and plowed his fields as he lived by making the most of the present. It was an ordinary life that did not particularly stand out.

"It's been a while since we've seen any young people in this village."

When the old man treated them to coffee after the meal, the two of them gratefully accepted the drinks after sweetening them with large amounts of sugar and milk.

"Aren't you going to ask what we're doing out here?"

In response to Ruler's question, Serge shook his head in a gentle manner.

"…Well. When two young people wander through a town in the middle of nowhere like this with only the clothes on their backs, it's not hard to figure out what's going on."

Sieg's body stiffened in shock.

"Well, I think it can't be helped since you two are young. But you should properly prepare before you run away next time, okay?"

It seems that Serge has seen through everything, Sieg thought. He glanced sideways at Ruler, but she looked at Sieg with a somehow embarrassed expression.

"I understand, we'll make sure to do that next time."

"Huh?"

Ruler was strangely surprised by Sieg's reply, which he found curious.

"So, what will you do now?"

"Of course, we'll go back… There are people waiting for me, after all."

Serge seemed a bit surprised by his answer. Shortly after, he nodded several times as if in understanding and sipped at his delicious coffee.

"…I see. Yeah, that's good. It really is important to get everyone's blessing."

"?"

Not understanding what he was talking about, Sieg glanced to his side, and for some reason, Ruler's eyes had started swimming. He didn't get it, but Sieg decided to focus on his coffee for now.

…In the end, since Sieg was also exhausted, the two of them decided to rest at Serge's house until noon. Serge gladly lent them his son's room which hadn't been used since he left the village.

"Even if we have permission, I wonder if this is all right…"

"T-That's true. But I'd feel bad about not willingly accepting his good will…"

It was a trivial conversation, but Sieg looked at Ruler quizzically. Sieg was a homunculus, and his communication experience was practically zero except for with Rider.

However, even so, he understood enough to know the appropriate distance between people when they spoke to one another. Ruler was consciously distancing herself from Sieg. The distance between them was about three meters. Rather, she was hiding herself behind the room's door and wouldn't come out from there.

"Why are you so far away?"

"Ah, err. It seems that Laeticia inside me is bad with men, so I can't interact normally with you unless I maintain this distance—"

Ruler spoke apologetically… but she stayed hidden behind the door.

"No, but you didn't seem that on guard against me when we first met."

"…It was at night. And I deemed it more important to see what kind of person you were since I didn't know you. Now that the situation has calmed down, the Laeticia inside me is coming out a bit more strongly."

"The possessed is affecting you the possessor?"

"Yes…. Though this is also a first experience for me. I'm certainly conscious of myself as Ruler, Jeanne d'Arc. However, at the same time, Laeticia's consciousness remains. In particular, she serves as the base for my knowledge that concerns matters outside of the Holy Grail War."

"Aren't there any inconveniences?"

"Like I said before, besides the necessity of eating and sleeping… Ah."

Ruler took out a book from the bag she carried. It seemed to be some kind of textbook on mathematics.

"It's somewhat inconvenient that I don't understand mathematics at all."

She lightly complained with a bitter smile.

"…Is high-level mathematics necessary for the Holy Grail War?"

In response to Sieg's extremely natural question, Ruler entwined both her hands' fingers together and replied with a somewhat pouting expression.

"No, it's true that it's unrelated, but… I can't get the equation problems out of my head no matter what I do, and I can't quite seem to calm down about it…"

Indeed, one wouldn't be able to remain calm about that. If Sieg could be of even a little use, perhaps he should help.

"…Lend me the textbook for a little bit. I might be able to solve them."

"Eh, really!?"

When Sieg nodded affirmatively, her expression sparkled brightly.

"Then, err, I suppose I'll let you get closer."

After giving a single cough, Ruler approached Sieg with somewhat awkward footsteps. They sat down on chairs and faced each other with a small dining table between them.

"P-Please go ahead."

Bowing her head, Ruler held out the textbook and a pencil. Sieg accepted them and opened the designated page. He read it silently for a while, and then filled in the answers into the black spaces in the textbook.

"I think this is the correct answer."

"…T-That was admirably well done."

After reading the answer, she bowed deeply. *It's not such a big deal,* Sieg thought. He had merely had that kind of knowledge since he was born.

"…"

"…"

Silence suddenly fell between them. Sieg gazed at Ruler with his red eyes. She seemed uncomfortable with being stared at and nervously glanced around the room.

In the room Serge had furnished them with, there was a bed, a small table for two, and two sturdily-built chairs. There was nothing else besides a closet in the corner. Most likely, the son who had used this room had taken his personal effects with him when he left the village. But the room was still thoroughly cleaned.

"…He must really be treasured."

"Who?"

Sieg enquired about the words Ruler murmured to herself.

"Ah, I mean Serge's son."

"…?"

When Sieg tilted his head quizzically, Ruler realized the reason and cast her eyes down somewhat sadly. It's true that he was endowed with knowledge. He was both logical and intelligent. However, at the same time, there were many things he didn't understand as well. Rather than ignorant, perhaps it was better to call him pure and innocent.

It wasn't just because he was a homunculus. Having been made to serve as a prana supply, he probably lacked many things.

"Do you understand? This room probably hasn't been used since his son left the village. That can be surmised from the fact that Serge-san lives alone and the meagreness of this room's furnishings."

"Hmm, that's logical."

"So, normally speaking, this room would be a good room even if it wasn't clean. No, rather, it wouldn't be a problem even if this room was covered in dust. And yet, this room has been completely wiped of dust. The one who cleans it can only be—"

"Serge-dono."

It was a logical conclusion. He lived alone and didn't have the money to hire a maid.

"It's possible that he's a tidy person, but the first floor is a bit messy and disorderly. Though, of course, not to the point that it could be called unsanitary."

Certainly, just as Ruler said, the things he should normally tidy up, like his clothes and farming tools, were still lying scattered about, but it didn't seem like he didn't care about them at all either.

"So, we can surmise that keeping this room clean is more important to him than tidying up the first floor where he conducts the main part of his daily life. In other words, that can only be an act out of love."

Sieg thought it over for a while, and then refuted it with a shake of his head.

"…No, that's not the only possibility. It's also possible that the son is atrocious and has completely enslaved his father Serge-dono, making him do forced labor like cleaning his room every day even after he left—"

"That's impossible."

"Certainly, the chances are extremely small, but…"

"I said it's impossible."

Sieg couldn't help feeling somewhat unconvinced, but he obediently nodded. He was ignorant, and even if she was a Heroic Spirit, she was a human who bore knowledge of this era. Her logic was probably correct.

"…Hmph. Well, you are a newborn, Sieg-*kun*. So I suppose it can't be helped. But leaning about the subtleties of human relations… about the heart is also important. If there's anything you're unclear about, I'll teach you about it to the best of my abilities."

Ruler puffed up her chest proudly. *I think this way of talking is referred to as 'acting like a senpai'*, Sieg remembered. But there was something that bothered him more than that.

"Hey, wait a minute."

"Yes, what is it, Sieg-kun?"

"…No, why are you adding [kun] to the end of my name?"

"Because Sieg is younger than me, right? So I don't think there's any problem with using [kun]. Do you dislike it?"

"Ah, I don't really—dislike it, I think, but…"

I don't think I dislike it, but something seems wrong about it… Sieg wanted to say that, but since that 'something' was too vague for him to articulate, he couldn't raise any objections.

"Then I'll call you Sieg-kun from now on. Please call me either Ruler or Jeanne as you like."

"I get it, I get it already. Then, Ruler, I have a question, but… is it okay if I ask you?"

"Yes, go ahead."

"In the first place, what is 'Ruler'? You said it was the class that conducts the management of the Holy Grail War, but…"

Sieg had been furnished with knowledge about the Holy Grail War to a certain point. But besides knowing that that the crucial class known as [Ruler] existed, everything else about the class was unclear to him.

He decided that he should at least ask what Ruler's objective was and what she prioritized.

"…Yes, that's an understandable question. Basically, it's nearly impossible for a Ruler to be summoned in a normal Holy Grail War. There are two big cases where a Ruler like me is summoned. The first case is when a Ruler is summoned due to the Holy Grail War taking place in an extremely peculiar form and an unknown number of consequences would come about as a result. In other words, this refers to cases when the central pillar of the ritual, the Holy Grail, deems that the Servant Ruler, who is under no one's control, is needed in this ritual. Like now,

with the Great Holy Grail War where seven Servants fight seven other Servants—the largest-scale Holy Grail War in history. And the other case is where there is a possibility that distortions will appear in the world due to the effects of the Holy Grail War."

"Distortions… in the world?"

"Yes. In the current Holy Grail War, people who become Masters control Heroic Spirits as Servants and compete for the Holy Grail, but the majority of the people who become Masters are magi who prioritize the concealment of magecraft and the war. So there are rarely situations that beckon mayhem into the world, and even when there are—they are dealt with as simple disasters in most cases."

"Disasters… huh."

"Yes. It's something that shouldn't happen, but it's also true that it can't be helped. Many Holy Grails are forgeries quite different from the real thing. However, their 'function' is another matter. There are more than a few that can function as an omnipotent, wish-granting device. That is something that mustn't spread through the world as public information."

"I suppose that's true… The people who are able to have their wishes granted by the Grail aren't limited to saints."

Ruler nodded with a sad expression.

"Of course, I don't mind if the person isn't a saint and wishes to fulfill a personal desire. As long as it doesn't beckon the world's destruction, I would properly respect the wish. However, there are rare people who would plan to destroy the world itself. They might be magi, or some other kind of person… Ruler is summoned when that destruction could theoretically come about due to the Holy Grail War and is given the duty of protecting the framework of the Holy Grail War."

"…When it could theoretically come about? Then, does that mean it's possible that there is someone planning to destroy the world in this Great Holy Grail War as well?"

If that were true, it was a serious matter. After all, this time it wasn't a battle between seven Servants against one another, but a war between two sides with seven Servants each.

"I wonder about that. It's true that several of my abilities as Ruler aren't functioning correctly. Whether that's due to an abnormal phenomenon in the Holy Grail War or something else completely, I still don't know… Also, even if someone is planning something, it could be either the Black faction or the Red faction. Or it could also be another force entirely. There are no precedents of an all-out battle between two sides of seven Servants each. Furthermore, the Holy Grail they are seeking this time is the Greater Grail of [Fuyuki], which served as the original basis for all subspecies Holy Grail Wars. It's a holy object, an artifact created by three magi. So I can't still definitely say what the cause for my summoning is."

However, compared to the Black faction who merely tried to bring Ruler to their side, the Red faction attempted to assassinate her with Lancer, the Servant who could boast of being the strongest among their faction. Based on the situation, the Red faction was exceedingly suspicious.

"…It's really a serious situation. I'm grateful for you assisting me in spite of that."

"Fufu, it's fine. You were someone involved in this Great Holy Grail War from the moment you were born. I want to respect your will and determination. Also—"

There, Ruler's words awkwardly cut off. When Sieg tilted his head curiously at her, she shook her head softly.

"I'm sorry. I think it'd be better if you didn't think anything of my words just now. For some reason, umm, the words I'm expressing are very, like that, and that, and also that…"

"I have no idea what you're trying to say."

"Umm, it's just that I have no positive proof yet, so… please forget about it for now."

Sieg decided to agree to her request. In the first place, she was the only person besides Rider he could rely on now.

"There's no reason for me not to believe in a saint like you. I don't mind, you can talk to me about it when you have the positive proof you need."

After Sieg plainly declared that, she blushed and nodded.

"I don't know whether I'm embarrassed or happy to hear you say that. But I'll do my best."

Her voice was small, but there was definitely determination in it. A diamond-hard determination that couldn't be shaken by anything.

"Now then, since we've calmed down, there's a problem I'd like to clear up."

"Ah, what a coincidence. I was thinking the same thing."

Sieg and Ruler both awkwardly looked at the bed. It was a single bed, and was very cramped. Sieg had gone through the entire morning without even a wink of sleep since his escape in the dead of night, and Laeticia's body was also near it limits.

But the bed was only big enough to properly fit one person to sleep on it. If both of them slept on it, they would be glued to each other like affectionate lovers. Of course, it seemed that Serge thought that they were lovers.

"I'll sleep on the floor, so you—"

"I don't mind sleeping on the floor, though."

"B-But. Based on what you said, Sieg-kun, you haven't slept at all since last night, right?"

"That's true. But perhaps thanks to this heart, I don't feel that tired."

"That's a lie. You look totally exhausted. I'm a Heroic Spirit, so it's no problem for me."

"No, but you said just earlier that you have to eat and sleep. You should sleep on the bed for the sake of the girl whose body you're using as well."

"Guh, it's unfair to bring up Laeticia as an excuse—then, how about we at least sleep together?"

"The bed is narrow. We'd be glued to each other. Laeticia hates men, right?"

"No, it's fine. She may be inexperienced with men, but she's a girl that truly feels that it's bad to be heartless. She has no objections to sleeping together."

"…Don't you feel embarrassed?"

In response to those words, Ruler turned silent and averted her eyes while blushing.

"…I'm fine."

Since she said she was fine, she was probably fine. Sieg finally agreed to it, and the two of them somehow managed to lay their bodies together on the narrow bed. It was cramped, but fatigue settled into them like a log, and they couldn't help feeling sleepy.

Ruler's face was right in front of Sieg's. She seemed to have reached her limit as her eyes started closing just by laying down. Sieg was also exhausted, and he had been on the verge of closing his eyes for this past while as well… but, the fear that nested in his chest stopped sleep from taking hold.

Was this entire reality a dream, where everything would return to the way it was before the instant he fell asleep—and would he awaken in that prana supply tank? Here he had been given much compassion and fortunate blessings. Perhaps the world wasn't so kind, and instead—

"Good night, Sieg-kun."

His foolish thoughts were drowned out by that whisper and the smile like that of an affectionate mother in front of him. Yeah, this really did seem to be reality. If it were all a dream, that would mean she was a product of his imagination. But there was no way—he could imagine such a smile.

"Good night."

The instant he said that and closed his eyes, Sieg's consciousness cut off. Without even the chance to see a dream, he slept while feeling as if he were falling. Even so, he felt no fear in it.

…When they next regained awareness, they found that they had both rolled off the bed onto the floor. Their heavy weariness had been reduced, but their joints hurt due to sleeping on the hard floor.

"…I guess it really was impossible."

"Yeah."

They smiled wryly at each other and stood up. After that, they told Serge they were leaving now, but he said "Wait a bit" and carried over a mountain of luggage from the kitchen.

"Here, here, put these on."

He handed them a bunch of preserved dried meat and bread. He even gave them a thermos of coffee, and Sieg accepted it all in bewilderment.

"Umm, I'm grateful for you giving us all this, but unfortunately, we don't have anything to repay you with."

"I don't need any… But, I know. Make sure to protect the young lady there."

"Eh?"

Sieg tilted his head with a puzzled expression, and the old man struck his shoulder vigorously while smiling.

"You have the ability to do that much."

"A-All right! L-Let's get going now, Sieg-kun!"

With questions marks still hovering over his head, Sieg was forced to start leaving as Ruler pushed his back. But there was one thing he had to ask Serge. He forcefully stopped his feet and turned around.

"Can I ask you one thing?"

"What is it?"

"Do you love your son?"

Serge blinked upon hearing that crazy question, but then his tanned and rugged face immediately made a satisfied smile and he answered it.

"Of course I do! He's my pride and joy. He's working hard right now in another country somewhere."

Even Sieg could understand that that smile was from the bottom of Serge's heart, praying for the well-being of his son who had left the nest and rejoicing at his success.

Ruler pulled at his sleeve and said "Didn't I tell you?" with a smile. Sieg nodded, and shouted "Thank you!" to Serge.

"Good luck to you both!"

After waving their hands back at those words of farewell, the two of them returned to the mountain once more. Walking alongside Ruler who had completely regained her vitality, Sieg tilted his head in puzzlement again.

"What did he mean by 'protect you', I wonder…"

"Sieg-kun, that was just a misunderstanding on his part. You shouldn't think about it too deeply."

"…Yeah, I suppose you're right, but…"

When Sieg said that, Ruler strangely turned her face away from him as if sulking, confusing him even more.

In any case, Ruler and the member of her entourage returned to the mountain once more and headed towards the Fortress of Millennia. They would probably reach the forest by nighttime.

"…How should I convince the other homunculi?"

When Sieg asked that as he wracked his brain for a solution, Ruler gently admonished him.

"That's something you must think about for yourself. However, you did hear cries for [help], right?"

"Yeah, I'm sure of it… The other homunculi should have heard those voices as well."

"Then how about appealing to that? —Don't worry, they will surely listen if you speak to them."

Her words had a mysterious persuasiveness. Just by hearing her say "Don't worry", he felt as if the path to success was guaranteed.

"…Thank you. I'll do my best."

"Yes, I hope that your prayer will reach them."

But contrary to the boy's hopes, the two of them would end up witnessing something unexpected when they were halfway to the fortress.

And that 'something' was the [meaning] behind Jeanne d'Arc's being summoned as Ruler.

***

As if his mind was creaking, he saw a dream of battle.

That world was on the verge of death from the start. The malice of the rulers covered the land, and they greedily devoured the meat of the weak who were unable to even resist.

The weak could only despair. As they continued to be exploited, they eventually found a single thing to rely on—words of salvation filled with love.

Beautiful words that couldn't be defeated by starvation, poverty or despair… But the rulers tried to take even that from them. It was no longer exploitation; it was murder.

So they rose up. Their fear of having their right to live taken away overcame their fear of dying in battle.

Among them was a young boy. No one knew whether his presence there was a coincidence or the will of God, but before anyone realized it, the boy was leading them.

Their battle should have no defeat. And no victory either.

Because by rising up, they were both losers and victors at the same time. Indeed, they had no fists to swing; all they had left was the power to rise up. However, the act of rising up itself was a necessary act. They rose up for the sake of what they believed in—that in itself was important and what they wished for. The sacrifices would be kept to a minimum, and even if several people including themselves became sacrifices, the world wouldn't die, but would instead be reborn.

…That was how it should have been.

Even God will occasionally exercise malice due to good will. The miraculous power granted to the boy by God brought the possibility of victory that should have been impossible.

Miracles are, after all, things that only happen rarely. A miracle is a phenomenon that occurs when the heavens, earth and all people mesh together, and even then it still requires that everything be left to the roll of the dice.

Unfortunately, the boy attained victory.

Everyone went wild and became excited over the victory. They clung to the boy, who had won a battle where victory should have been impossible, as a child of miracles. That foolish purity of theirs troubled the boy.

They shouldn't have won. Winning was not an option. He had been caught up in saving lives in the near future and averted his eyes from the bigger picture.

They may bite a cornered cat—but after being bitten, the enraged cat would retaliate by slaughtering them. That was the truth of this world.

I was naïve.

The cut-off heads of old people, the men chopped up like experimental animals, babies pierced by spears, girls violated in the pursuit of lust and then thrown away afterwards—it was truly a place worthy of being called hell. And the countless lives gathered here were not taken away by the enemy, but by the boy. He was convinced of that—and yet, that made it all the more impossible for the boy to yield and give up.

The boy, without once changing expression, accepted this result with a will of steel. He merely gazed at this scene of ruin. He revealed no resignation or sorrow and even overcame the pain of his dismembered arms.

He accepted that he had lost.

He accepted that he would die.

He accepted that the responsibility for all their deaths lay with him.

But the one thing he wouldn't accept—was that everything would fall to ruins after this. He couldn't accept it. After having wasted so many lives, he absolutely could not accept that nothing would be gained as a result.

So, God. Give me another chance. Next time, I won't lose sight of the bigger picture. I will eliminate all obstacles, enemies and hardships in my way. Next time, I will obtain all the good in the world. *A world where everyone is happy, everyone is good, and everyone is perfect. I will exterminate all evil and create a new, pure world.*

—He saw a happy dream of prayer that mesmerized his mind.

…Shirou Kotomine awoke from a languid dream. Rather than a proper dream, he had simply dragged out faint yet nostalgic memories. He had intended to doze a bit, but it seemed he had fallen completely asleep.

"So you're awake, Master. Rider and Archer have returned."

Assassin of Red, Semiramis, seemed to have put his head on her lap and watched over him as he slept. It was an act truly unlike the queen.

"Guh. Why am I on your lap?"

He had no memory of doing that. He remembered lying down on the couch, but there should have been no one around then.

"I am Assassin, after all."

She giggled in amusement. Shirou accepted with a troubled expression that laughter which had bewitched men and driven them crazy when she was alive.

"What are we going to do if someone saw us like this…?"

"Don't worry, no one saw us. Hmph, I finally did something Servant-like on a whim, so what are you dissatisfied with?"

Her expression suddenly became sulky.

"It's because it's embarrassing. But thank you."

While smiling bitterly, Shirou got up from his prone position. Assassin nodded in satisfaction.

"Well said… Leaving that aside, it's time. Everyone has gathered. Though we've lost Berserker."

"…He's not a Servant for us to worry over having lost. But he will be a bit of a nuisance if he's turned against us as an enemy."

"Yes, the problem is his Noble Phantasm—**Howl of the Wounded Beast** (Crying Warmonger)."

They both sighed. They highly valued the unequaled strength of Berserker's Noble Phantasm in battle. But it was far too difficult to control. The only way to use it was to send him to the frontlines the instant battle started and leave him alone until he died.

Berserker's **Crying Warmonger** was a Noble Phantasm that converted all damaged dealt to him into prana and then released it. Since its ability was used on himself instead of the enemy, this Noble Phantasm was tentatively categorized as an Anti-Unit type, but it had substantial potential for massive destruction equivalent to an Anti-Army type Noble Phantasm.

The problem was that its range was far too extensive. If it was mistakenly used, it would definitely invite the miserable result of bringing about greater casualties on his own side.

"Fortunately, we know of his Noble Phantasm… It's unclear to what extent he can invoke it, but any Servant will be able to sense him using it."

At that point, they would have no choice but to run away. No matter their dispositions, no Servant enjoyed fighting on top of a bomb, and there was no need to either.

"Either way, it's fortunate for us that the other side no longer has their Saber. It's fine to think that the course of the Great Holy Grail War will be nearly decided through this next battle… It's best that there be no Servants who can block the attack of our Lancer."

As Assassin murmured that in satisfaction, Shirou frowned slightly and his expression darkened.

"What's wrong?"

"Yes, it's certainly just as you say, but…"

Shirou Kotomine was a priest despatched by the Church, and he also had the duty of being the overseer of this Great Holy Grail War. Therefore, he possessed the [spirit board] that was given to the overseer and could perfectly grasp the state of all fourteen Servants.

Incidentally, the Yggdmillennia faction had also obtained a [spirit board] through their connections. Thanks to the sub-species Holy Grail Wars, there were abundant means to purchase one.

"I've confirmed that Saber has died with the [spirit board], but it seems his Line hasn't been completely cut."

—So Shirou declared. Assassin frowned and accepted his words.

"Hoh, so he's alive?"

"No, it shows that he's dying. He's probably on the verge of death; at the very least, it should be impossible for him to fight… But the fact that he's remained in this state since last night is incomprehensible."

In addition, he had used familiars concealed inside the bodies of homunculi within the Fortress of Millennia to eavesdrop on the Yggdmillennia Masters lamenting terribly over having lost Saber.

"Then is he simply hurt?"

"It would be good if that were it, but… In any case, we'll send out Lancer again in the likely scenario that Saber is revived."

After returning from his battle with Saber of Black, Lancer unusually whispered with some slight emotion, "I'd like to fight with him again." Shirou had decided to respect his wish. In the first

place, the only ones who could fight more than an even match against a formidable enemy like Saber were Lancer or Rider.

However, Rider seemed to be obsessed with facing Archer of Black.

But then, Saber of Black probably wasn't alive anymore, and even if he were alive, he would be unable to fight while on the verge of death like this, but—

"Please don't tell Lancer about Saber of Black. It'd be troubling if he went searching for Saber on the battlefield."

When they arrived at the throne room, Rider and Archer were relaxing as they pleased. Rider was lying down and looking up at the ceiling, while Archer was sitting on the floor and roasting an animal she seemed to have killed herself, eating the meat on a skewer.

"Oh my, I apologize for making you both wait."

Assassin shrugged and sighed in exasperation at Shirou's apology.

"What are you saying, Master? By the look of things, they were just self-indulgently passing time."

Rider and Archer turned their faces away with a "humph" at nearly the same time. It seemed the two of them had no intention of paying respect to Assassin, Queen Semiramis.

"Well, it's fine."

Nodding generously, she sat down on the throne. Shirou nestled up beside her as if he were her attendant.

"Where are Lancer and Caster?"

Rider responded to the question while still lying down.

"Ah… Lancer was vacantly gazing outside earlier. Caster is secluding himself in his workshop."

"Shall I go call them?"

"Hahaha, Master. If you go to summon them, won't it be like you're going around running errands? I'll call them using telepathic communication."

She lightly waved two fingers, and soon after the throne room's heavy doors opened.

"Lancer, I apologize for calling you here."

In response to those words, Lancer slowly shook his head. His face was white and deadpan like always. His expression didn't waver even a little, as if it were frozen in place.

"…I don't mind. Did you need something?"

"I'm sorry, I'll explain after one more person arrives."

————————Five minutes later, the last person made his entrance, while receiving irritated looks from everyone in the room. Throwing open the door, he entered with his arms spread exaggeratedly wide and shouted loudly.

"Oh, [For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright]! [Who art as black as hell, as dark as night]!"

Assassin sighed and asked a question.

"Is that how you think of me?"

The man she asked that—Caster of Red, the monster of literature Shakespeare nodded.

"Who else could I be describing, Queen of Assyria! …No, no, sorry about that. I was in high spirits and it just came to me. I had the pleasure of writing for the first time in a while, you see. Ah, by the way, Father Shirou. Though it's a bit sudden, there's something I want."

"Huh?"

"According to the knowledge I've been given, there is a device that lets one type letters with just the strike of a key, is there not?"

Shirou pondered for a short while, and then struck his fist against his hand in realization.

"…Ah, you mean a computer."

"Yes. Could you lend me the money to buy one?"

"Hmm, I don't mind. I'll lend you the money the day after tomorrow."

Shakespeare nodded in satisfaction. Assassin and the others could only watch this in utter amazement.

"Caster… you haven't forgotten about the Great Holy Grail War, right?"

"Of course not, my dear queen. There can only be one reason for us to be called and gathered like this. For war, correct? Heroes will vie for supremacy and start to kill each other to the extremes of savagery, correct? I, Caster, shall do my best—to watch it all attentively!"

"You're not going to fight?"

"That's right. The truth is that I'm extraordinarily inept at fighting and magecraft. [But you, gods, will give us some faults to make us men]."

Both Rider and Archer wanted to point out, "You're Caster, right?", but managed to control themselves. In truth, he was right; Shakespeare was a Heroic Spirit that did not commit acts of 'battle'. His role was to record the Holy Grail War and spin the story of the hardships, despair, hope and violence of the Masters (protagonists) to accompany the tale. The narrator does not come to the front, but merely supports those who stand at the front.

…If he had been summoned in a normal Holy Grail War, as long as his Master wasn't naturally gifted at close combat, he would have probably been destined to be defeated very early on in the war.

But fortunately for him, in a situation like the Great Holy Grail War, there was plenty of opportunity for him to play an active role. Thanks to the very unique [skill] he possessed.

"—In any case, everyone has gathered. Now that Saber of Black has fallen and our preparations are complete, the time for us to attack has come. A war with merely repeated skirmishes is not interesting, correct?"

In response to Assassin's words, Rider and Archer grudgingly nodded. Certainly, it was just as she said. They tired of mere skirmishes.

"This war is a rare occasion. It should be conducted flashily, should it not?"

Assassin smiled sweetly as she said that.

"—No, well, that's true. But aren't you the one who made the preparations to expressly make this castle and barricade ourselves within it?"

Rider said that with an amazed expression, but Assassin chuckled and replied.

"Barricade ourselves? Rider, the premise of your assumption is mistaken. My Noble Phantasm Hanging Gardens of Babylon **Aerial Gardens of Vanity** doesn't exist in order to defend. It's an offensive Noble Phantasm."

Rider and Archer both tilted their heads. Caster, who knew the details of this Noble Phantasm, smirked at their reactions, and Lancer remained unperturbed as always. Shirou, the only Master present here, smiled bitterly and chided Assassin.

"Assassin, please show it to us directly without that superior air of yours."

"Very well… Master, you are also comparatively excited about this, it seems."

"I am a man, after all."

"I see," Semiramis said in understanding, and then laid her hand on the huge jewel imbedded in the armrest of her throne. Instantly, the ground started shaking slightly.

The other Servants exchanged glances, wondering if it was an earthquake. The trembling gradually increased in in intensity… and then suddenly stopped.

"Fufu, go look outside."

Following her words, everyone except her left the throne room and rushed outside. The earthquake just now had clearly been intentionally caused by Assassin. But what on earth was the reason—

"Wha—!?"

Both Rider and Archer became speechless. Caster made an overly moved expression of delight and Shirou, who normally kept his expression calm as much as possible, also had unusually shining eyes of excitement. Even Lancer widened his eyes a little as he gazed down.

They were standing on a floor of stone that served as a balcony—and beneath it, there was just a wide expanse of empty air.

In other words, they were floating. Just as its name implied, this garden of vanity was hanging in midair…!

"You're all surprised, correct? …Well, its speed is nothing to praise, though."

There was a faint tone of pride in Assassin's words.

The Queen of Assyria, Semiramis. Her Noble Phantasm **Hanging Gardens of Babylon** was a flying fortress. However, it was impossible to manifest it through prana. First, materials consisting of stone and wood from a specific region must be gathered.

Once having gathered everything she needed, a long ritual needed to be held by Assassin herself, and then it would finally be complete as a Noble Phantasm... This process stemmed from the fact that, historically, Queen Semiramis did not create the Hanging Gardens in the first place.

In reality, she had never once seen the Hanging Gardens in her lifetime. However, she knew and instinctively sensed that it had been inscribed as part of her legend. This mystery was added to her legend after her death, but people's mental image of the Hanging Gardens being built by the world's most ancient assassin, the legendary queen, was very strong.

The Hanging Gardens first required materials. Materials that came from this world in the present day. Wood, stone, minerals, plants and water—all from the land she once lived in.

After gathering and assembling everything together, the ritual she conducted turned the mere 'illusion' into reality. It was a counterfeit turned real, a Noble Phantasm that normally should be absolutely impossible to exist.

Therefore, it possessed the word [vanity] in its title. People who knew the truth could only feel a kind of scorn for it. *Semiramis didn't build the Hanging Gardens,* they would say. However, vanity was not a fragile thing. No, since the materials had been gathered and the Noble Phantasm had managed to be successfully constructed, at the very least, this vanity had been turned into the truth in this day and age.

And this former illusionary garden—was far more absurd and ridiculous than the real one.

"Then, let us prepare for battle, everyone. At this speed, we have about an hour until we're close enough that the ones barricaded in the Fortress of Millennia see us coming."

Everyone was silent. Of course, it wasn't that they were nervous. Due to having been given the concrete number of one hour till battle, a drunkenly high fighting spirit had simply gushed forth within them.

"Caster. Are you finished with my sword I gave you earlier?"

"Yes, it's right here."

Caster materialized the object from an astral state and respectfully presented it.

"…Hey, Shirou?"

"What are you going to use that sword for? I don't want to think so, but—"

Rider and Archer both wore suspicious expressions. Smiling, Shirou took the sword and pulled the blade from its scabbard. Though the basic shape was the same as a Japanese sword, it bore various aspects due to the soul of the swordsmith. If there were beautiful and lovely blades that possessed a shine worthy of being called works of art, there were also broadminded and deadly blades like the one Shirou held that specialized in cutting something.

Even from the perspective of Servants who were knowledgeable about every kind of weapon from every time and place, that blade was a great sword worthy of being called first-rate.

"I will fight in Caster's place. Don't worry, I'm quite knowledgeable when it comes to battle."

But it was far too simplistic to say that he could fight equally in this battle of Servants just because he had that weapon.

"No, no, no, no, no. I won't say anything bad, but wouldn't it be better for you to remain holed up here like a Master should?"

"Rider is right. It does seem you have accumulated quite a bit of training, but you are still limited to the level of humans. If you come across an enemy Servant, it shall be the end for you."

Rider and Archer frantically tried to stop him. That was only natural; a normal Master should never head out to the front lines. Servants did not merely aim for other Servants. If the enemy Masters were a rational person, they would have their Servants kill a Master who nonchalantly came onto the battlefield. If the Master died, the countdown to their Servant's death would begin. At the very least, it would be virtually impossible for them to fight at full power without their Master.

Moreover, this next battle would definitely be a great decisive battle in the war. It would be a large battle where not only Servants would clash against Servants, but their own pawn pieces, Dragon Tooth Warriors, would be mobilized as well.

For a mere human like him to endure in a situation like that—at that point, Caster came between Rider and Archer as if to hold their words back and spoke to them.

"You two. I once wrote this in the past. [The better part of valor is discretion]. And I have never seen anyone with as much discretion as Father Shirou here. Furthermore!"

Acting as if in a play, he gathered everyone's attention on the blade Shirou held.

"I have bestowed an enchantment of some note onto this blade. To be blunt, it is now *equal to a C rank Noble Phantasm*."

Including Assassin, everyone besides Shirou stiffened at that proclamation. He had definitely said 'Noble Phantasm'. A certain-kill holy relic inscribed in legend, which each Servant possessed—that was what a Noble Phantasm should be.

"—Huh?"

"…In other words, what? You created a Noble Phantasm?"

"Your special skill… is [Enchant], correct? Is it perhaps due to that skill's ability?"

Caster answered "Precisely!" to Assassin's question and puffed up his chest proudly.

Strictly speaking, what Caster of Red—Shakespeare—used was not formal magecraft. No matter what kind of Reinforcement magecraft was used, it shouldn't be possible to strengthen something to the level of a Noble Phantasm.

In the first place, he hadn't actually enchanted the blade with magecraft. While gazing at the blade he'd been given, he had merely *written down* how the blade was magnificently sharp and how much blood it was stained in.

But if that writing was done by this world-famous literary master, it was a different story.

In this world, there existed Conceptual Weapons—armaments that did not possess a physical power, but rather manifested an effect through a concept possessed by the item in question. Shakespeare's texts, which he poured his soul into, were sufficient to imbue a certain-kill concept into even a pebble on the roadside.

"…Can I ask one thing? Why don't you fight using that?"

Lancer, who had remained silent until now, asked that to Caster. His question was only natural. If he could turn an ordinary sword into a Noble Phantasm, he should be able to fight with it.

"—I can't write about myself. That would just be an essay. Right now, I only have the ability to spin other people's tales and cannot write anything besides that."

Caster replied with a resolute tone. Lancer understood his words and spoke with a frown.

"So in other words, you find it troublesome."

"Well, pretty much."

Lancer nodded in understanding.

"…Then it can't be helped. Your goal is to depict the stories of others instead of yourself. Regardless of whether the end of the story is ruin or tragedy, you must write it to the very end. Therefore, your goal is to survive till the very end. Fighting on the front lines is out of the question."

Hearing those chillingly cold words—Caster smiled happily at being understood.

"Yes, that's precisely right! I want to witness the ending of this Great Holy Grail War! I must witness it! Whether it ends in fortune or misfortune, or even a despairing truth, watching everyone's story right till the end as a spectator is the duty that I have been charged with!"

Those were words that were impossible for a Servant summoned in a Holy Grail War. He had declared that he would watch as a spectator right till the end.

Archer and Rider didn't know whether to be amazed or angry.

"Either way, I basically have no battle power. So I wish to entrust the role of fighting to Father Shirou here, the one who possesses the greatest fighting power among our Masters."

"I don't mind… With this blade, I won't fall behind on the battlefield."

It was just as Shirou said. At the very least, with a blade that equaled a C rank Noble Phantasm, he would have no trouble with the likes of homunculi or golems.

"No, no. My own power is trivial. It's just that your blade was an incredibly famous sword. If not, I would not have been able to make it a Noble Phantasm as high as C rank."

"…It's because it was once the favored blade of a certain master swordsman."

Shirou muttered that. His expression loosened slightly, showing a mischievous smile.

"—It can't be helped. Master, I must control the flight of this garden, so I cannot directly go to the battlefield. I'll support you as much as possible, but don't get too deeply involved, okay?"

"I understand. I also understand my own abilities very well."

Even though he said that, Shirou had no intention of slacking at all in this war. He would fight using all his power and take the Greater Grail for himself using all his power. For the sake of that, he was willing to risk his life, and even if he had to commit deeds that were far from just and good, he would do so without any hesitation.

"Now then. Though we may have our generals gathered, it's sloppy to have zero troops. Even if the enemy has gathered only a mish-mash of homunculi and golems, they will be somewhat troublesome for us."

It was just as Assassin said, they had no troops. Even if their Masters mobilized all their familiars, it would amount to less than ten of them. However, they had the Assyrian Queen Semiramis on their side. She could produce an inexhaustible supply of expendable pawns.

"You may use my Dragon Tooth Warriors at your own discretion. Would three thousand be enough?"

Created using dragon teeth, Dragon Tooth Warriors were disposable rank-and-file troops… However, no matter how disposable they were, three thousand was just plain abnormal.

"Well, there's no such thing as having too much in quantity, but… even so, Assassin, isn't making that many impossible?"

"Normally, it would be impossible. But as long as I'm within these Hanging Gardens, nothing is impossible for me."

Assassin smiled in clear confidence at Rider's words. Yes, even if these Hanging Gardens traveled to another country, they were always treated as her personal field. All her stats were enhanced, and it even became possible for her to use magecraft that stepped into the realms of sorcery.

Of course, it came with a price. After all, this Noble Phantasm was almost foul play. Assassin of Red was rendered nearly powerless should she leave these gardens. But these gardens were a moving stronghold. It was unlikely that she would ever choose to leave these gardens in the first place.

"Then who shall cut through the enemy vanguard?"

At Shirou's question, Archer, Rider and Lancer exchanged glances. Caster, who had no intention of participating, acted as if it had nothing to do with him.

Lancer silently shook his head. It seemed he was saying, 'You can go first'. Thus, Archer and Rider started glaring at each other. It seemed it couldn't be helped that they both wanted to cut through the vanguard. Assassin shrugged as if amazed at their behavior, and Caster said, "I'll dedicate a poem to the one who cuts through the vanguard", pouring fuel on the fire.

"…Could you both please discuss it peacefully?"

Though it probably wasn't because they obeyed those words, in the end, the two of them agreed to a compromise.

"I'll cut through the vanguard."

It seemed they decided that Rider would be their vanguard. However, Archer summoned her own weapon, a bow, and hoisted it in the air.

"But I'll shoot the pre-emptive strike. I intended to use my Noble Phantasm from the beginning, after all."

"Understood. Then let's do that."

"So this is the first time you two will be working together as a group. Shall I write a love poem, then?"

Rider's eyes sparkled with joy at Caster's suggestion and he responded in agreement.

"Yeah, please do!"

And Archer scowled unpleasantly.

"No, I'd prefer if you didn't."

Caster decided to put together both their requests and make a heartrending poem about a man with unrequited love.

Watching the exchange with a bitter smile, Shirou turned his gaze towards the Fortress of Millennia, which was starting to become visible far off in the darkness of the night.

—His heart was beating noticeably fast.

Yeah, he could tell. He could definitely tell. It was definitely there. The thing he'd sought, sought and sought for so long was in that fortress.

He couldn't stop trembling in exaltation, and he desperately held back the corners of his mouth as they tried to loosen into a wild smile.

"—Even a man like you cannot hide your excitement when what you want is right before your eyes. You're still a child in that regard."

His trembling and smile ceased at the same time. Shirou silently turned his gaze to Assassin next to him with a slightly pouting look.

"No, it's fine as long as you can hold yourself back from jumping in excitement. More importantly, Master, if you should die, I will die, and if I die, all of our plans will come to nothing. You understand that, right?"

"Yes, of course."

Her Master calmly replied, making Assassin openly sigh.

"—Despite that, you intend to go out onto the battlefield. I can't understand it. Right now, you are a Master who supports a Servant. Normally speaking, you're in a position where you definitely should not step onto the battlefield. So why are you risking your life by heading to battle?"

Precisely because Assassin was his Servant, she well understood Shirou Kotomine's true power. He wouldn't fall behind the likes of homunculi or golems—though it was unknown how he would do if he fought a Servant.

In any case, there was no problem as long he was careful. There was no problem, but… there was still that one-in-a-million chance of something going wrong. Assassin had absolutely wanted to refuse Shirou from heading out onto the battlefield. But no matter how many times she explained her reasoning, he had stubbornly refused to listen.

Assassin had no interest in his motives and thought he might take back his previous words if push came to shove. But seeing his determination not falter even at the last moment, she couldn't help but want to ask why he must behave so recklessly.

Shirou hesitated slightly, but as if resigning himself, he answered in a quiet voice.

"If my plan is something that goes against God, then I will definitely be struck down on this battlefield. I might have the misfortune of fighting a Servant and dying, or I might let my guard down and be killed by homunculi or golems. I might even get caught up in the blast of an ally's Noble Phantasm."

People die. And even Servants die. Things like good people getting caught up in something unreasonable and meeting a tragic end was an everyday occurrence.

If he *wasn't in the right*, then he would definitely meet his end like that.

"If that happens, I will solemnly accept my death. God couldn't forgive me. That is something that I can't do anything about. But if—if everything goes well."

Assassin was overawed. It wasn't really because Shirou did anything; he merely stopped his usual smile and directly faced Assassin.

There was no ominousness, madness, rage or hatred to be found in his eyes. Rather, they were calm like a still lake. So much so that one wouldn't think he was someone about to head to battle—he was absolutely calm.

"Then that means God approves of my deeds. That my wish for the Greater Grail, to love… and heal all humans is just. If I can be certain of that, I will no longer waver. I will know that there is indeed worth in betraying even what should never be betrayed."

Shirou spoke in a resolute tone. He was heading to the battlefield in order to confirm whether or not his objective was correct. To Assassin, it was nothing more than a reckless and foolish act.

But—most likely, this was something Shirou had to do. An extraordinary obsession of his that other people couldn't understand. It was a ritual that was necessary for him to perform no matter what, in order to solidify his resolution without any doubts.

"—Hmph, honestly speaking, I can't understand it at all."

"I suppose not."

Shirou smiled bitterly. She was right. Other people probably couldn't understand the idea of heading to the battlefield where death was rampant everywhere in order to decide whether you were in the right or not.

Just when he thought she would oppose his decision, though, Assassin declared in a manner as if ordering a retainer.

"However, if you don't do this, you won't be able to move forward. Then it can't be helped. I'll allow it. Fight as you wish, but make sure you survive."

"Thank you," Shirou said in gratitude. Immediately after, the Hanging Gardens gently came to a halt. The Fortress of Millennia was just ahead. Between the Hanging Gardens and the fortress was a forest that spread out to both sides and a grass-covered plain in the middle of it.

In other words, this was their battlefield. The Red Servants and the Master Shirou Kotomine gathered at the prow of the Hanging Gardens.

"The other side is probably all frantic right about now."

Archer nodded at Caster's words. Her vision, which she had trained well as a bowman, could see to some extent the state of the fortress despite being several kilometers away and wrapped in the night's darkness.

"Yes, no Servants have yet been sent out to intercept us. They all seem to be in a panic at our sudden appearance… They're giving off that kind of presence."

Perhaps due to her animal instincts, Archer seemed to be able to perceive even the presence of the humans inside the fortress.

"Then let's use this time to line up our 'rank-and-file soldiers'."

Assassin waved her hand, and a giant pot that looked to be about three meters in diameter appeared floating in midair. The giant pot floated over the edge of the gardens where Assassin and the others stood, and then turned over.

At once, slightly yellowed bone fragment poured out from it to the ground below like rain. They buried into the ground and then grew out like plants, and eventually skeletal warriors with lizard like jaws were created one by one.

"…They look fragile."

Archer murmured while looking down at them.

"Yes, that's right. They're fragile, extremely fragile. But they're great in numbers. Though they're no match for Servants, they're sufficient for fighting homunculi, and if their Caster is a small fry like *our* Caster, then they might be able to kill him."

"Hahaha, how harsh. But not all the Casters in the world are superb writers such as I!"

Caster calmly said that in retort. Assassin decided not to say anything else to him.

"…Hmm, the members of the Black faction have finally come out."

No other besides Archer could yet see the members of the other side through the thick darkness. It appeared that the Yggdmillennia clan and their Servants were finally starting to act.

It was going to be completely different from the skirmishes until now. Now there was a battlefield, soldiers, weapons, commanders, a territory that needed to be captured, and most of all, a [king] that needed to be slain.

There was just a short time left until the decisive battle with the goal of complete annihilation of the other side began. The Red Servants patiently waited for the moment it started—

***

The Yggdmillennia had predicted that the Masters of the Association of Magi… in other words, the Red faction would attack them and had prepared plans to counterattack from all directions.

They might suddenly launch an attack from the city of Trifas, or they might attack from the east with a large army. The possibility that they might launch a surprise attack from the sky wasn't low either. But—

"…For them to attack with their own fortress is truly beyond expectations."

Archer of Black—Chiron sighed. His gaze was locked on Assassin's prided Noble Phantasm, the **Hanging Gardens of Babylon**, as it floated in the air far above.

"Archer, what is that thing's current status?"

Fiore asked that in a thin voice from next to him. Archer could perceive a slight tremble in her voice, but that was only because he was a Servant. A normal human would not have sensed even the smallest tremble in her voice. Archer smiled at his Master as she tried to remain as calm as she could.

"It has come to a standstill in midair… This is just conjecture on my part, but it appears that the Erythros faction intends to use these grassland plains as their battlefield."

"So it's going to be an all-out battle."

"Yes. You and the other Masters should head somewhere safe. The other side likely intends to encamp themselves with their Servants and familiars."

"—So it seems. They appear to have summoned Dragon Tooth Warriors. Probably in order to face our homunculi and soldiers."

Darnic landed on the castle rampart with a soft tap. He seemed to have boldly gone around looking at that floating fortress.

"Grandfather…"

"Let's head inside, Fiore. We have no choice but to leave the battle to them now."

"Precisely, Darnic. What follows from here is the domain of us Servants."

Particles of light resolved and gathered together, regaining human form. Lancer of Black—Vlad III wore a savage smile as he gazed at the floating fortress.

No, it wasn't just Lancer. Berserker of Black, Frankenstein, and Caster of Black, Avicebron, also stood on the ramparts, glaring at the floating fortress.

"On top of intruding into my territory in that kind of ugly thing, they've scattered filthy skeleton warriors everywhere."

Lancer openly laid bare his displeasure. The moment they trespassed on his territory, they were enemies, conquerors, Ottoman Turks. A strong sense of duty that obligated him to massacre them all bound his entire body.

"My lord. We will take refuge inside the castle. But if those grassland plains become the battlefield, we will fight with our backs to the town. So you may wield your power to your heart's content."

Darnic respectfully bowed, and Lancer nodded placidly.

"Indeed. Also, release Rider and Berserker of Red. We'll have them added to our forces as well."

"Is that all right? Leaving aside Berserker, Rider is—"

"I don't mind. They've come this far seeking an all-out showdown. It is only good manners to throw out all our forces as well."

"…Understood. I'll go release them right away."

Darnic disappeared from sight. Fiore also followed after him and retreated into the castle.

"Archer. Take command of the organized formations of homunculi along with Rider."

"Understood, Lancer. However, should Rider of Red take the field, I will have to go in order to stop him…"

"I don't mind. It's fine as long as you take command at the beginning. The battle will eventually become chaotic anyhow, and the homunculi will merely be expended along with the golems."

Archer nodded. Lancer was correct. Once the opening strike of the battle ended, the situation would immediately turn into a battle between Servants.

"As for you, Caster, remain on standby here. I'll leave the timing to release Berserker of Red's shackles to your judgement."

"Understood. Ah, that's right. Lancer, there is no way you can go to battle on foot. I've prepared a horse for you."

At those words, Lancer looked at Caster with great interest in his gaze.

"Of course, it's an artificial imitation, but—"

"That's quite satisfactory. An ordinary horse could never accompany me in this war."

What Caster brought out was, naturally, a giant golem horse of metal. It was made of a combination of iron and bronze with an uneven design. Its eyes consisted of a red ruby and blue sapphire, which each carried a bewitching shine.

"Quite satisfactory."

Smiling in satisfaction, Lancer climbed onto the horse. The horse didn't even whinny and obediently stood upright.

"Huh, Lancer's riding on a horse? My position's been taken!"

That somewhat loud voice made the atmosphere turn tense. It belonged to the Servant who had just been released, Rider of Black—Astolfo. He wore a carefree smile on his face and greeted Lancer, who had ordered him to be imprisoned, with an unconcerned attitude.

"Rider. I won't ask if you've reflected on your actions at this point. Now is the time for you to show your power to me. Your power as one of the Twelve Paladins of Charlemagne."

Rider reassuringly struck his chest.

"Yeah, leave it to me! That is that, and this is this. Fighting in this war is my mission, after all!"

"If you're aware of that, then there's no problem. Rider, join with Archer in commanding the homunculi."

"Roger!"

Lastly, Lancer turned his eyes to Berserker, who was still glaring at the floating fortress.

"Berserker. You are free to do as you wish. Fight and wreak havoc until you're exhausted."

"Uu… uuuuui…"

Berserker gave a single, light nod. She had both her hands on the castle rampart, appearing ready to jump over them even now.

"—Now then, everyone. Saber has vanished, and Assassin is not on our side. In return, we managed to get a hold of Berserker of Red, but he is merely a disposable [weapon]. In other words, we are the entirety of our battle power."

"On the other hand, the other side most likely has all six of their Servants excluding Berserker. Lancer of Red fought evenly with Saber, and Rider of Red did not receive a single wound from

Saber's attacks. Caster and Assassin, who have yet to be seen, are undoubtedly fearsome enemies as well."

Those were words that acknowledged the disadvantage of their side. They were inferior in pure numbers, and while the enemy's overall quality was unknown, at the very least, they no longer had Saber, so it would be a hard battle.

Yes, they were overwhelmingly outmatched—if this was a normal battle, the difference between their forces was sufficient to guarantee that they would be defeated first.

"Now then. I have a question for you all. Do any of you intend to accept defeat?"

Everyone present rejected that notion with their words and actions.

The difference in battle power was overwhelming, and the chances of their defeat were high—in the face of that truth, Lancer and the other Servants didn't act agitated at all. Heroic Spirits were such beings. Against an overwhelming disadvantage and a despairing situation, they would laugh and overturn such things. That was what made them worthy of being called heroes.

"Yes, exactly right. We will win! As if anyone who falls before this degree of difference in battle power, this degree of despair could call themselves heroes!"

His words were correct. After all, Lancer's true name was Vlad III, the great hero who had protected his country over and over again from the soldiers of the approaching Ottoman Turks.

What was definite was the fact that, in 1462, the Ottoman Turks invaded. Against the Turks' forces of one hundred and fifty thousand, the Wallachian army that Vlad III commanded consisted of only ten thousand. However, he had exhausted the Turks with thorough guerilla warfare and scorched-earth tactics, and then evacuated the citizens in order to empty the country's capital and ambush the enemy.

The one who had commanded the Turks was Mehmed II, the Ottoman sultan known as 'the Conqueror' who had felled Constantinople with its threefold defensive walls. Even he, widely known for his bravery, paled when he arrived at the capital of Bucharest.

Countless stakes stood surrounding the citadel. Impaled upon them were his comrades, subordinates, and commanders—twenty thousand members of the Turk army. The instant he saw them, anything like hatred for his comrades being killed was blown away. He was terrified. Someone who could not only think of such a thing, but put it into practice was terrifying. The plunder, violations, and atrocities his own army had committed were merely the result of having their lusts and desires accelerated in the heat of the moment. This was different, committed under a completely different way of thinking.

This was truly a method of warfare that didn't treat people as human beings. After all, his men had been skewered merely for *the sake of display*…!

The morale of his army having plummeted to nearly zero, Mehmed II had no choice but to withdraw and return home. At that time, Mehmed II muttered this.

Dracul
—I fear no human being. But demon alone is a separate matter.

"Those are savages. Fools who dirty my dominion and laugh crudely in arrogance can only die. Kill them while laughing. We must thoroughly re-educate those who lack the knowledge of fear with an ox-hide whip."

Lancer's words were extreme, but were in fact easy to understand.

Don't let the enemy go home alive. What he wanted to say was simply that. And that was exactly as the other Servants wished as well.

"Then, I'll lead the vanguard."

Lancer grasped the reins of his horse and jumped off from the castle ramparts along with his steed. The height of the cliff that rose up beneath the ramparts was over a hundred meters, but the metal horse that Caster of Black had created wouldn't be damaged by something of that degree.

Like a lone general with but a single army—Lancer rode his horse towards the enemy formation. The grassland plains were tranquil, but they would probably be transformed into scorched earth by the time this battle ended.

Resurrected into the present day with new subordinates, the stern king once more challenged the enemy in a disadvantageous battle. But that was how it always was for him, so there was nothing for him to fear.

Eventually, the homunculi commanded by two Servants and the golems massed together into troops. Archer and Rider's commands were splendid, and in a flash they were all arranged into orderly formation.

At the flank of the troops was Caster, who had brought along the still-sealed Berserker of Red. The plan was for him to choose the timing to release Berserker at his own discretion. Berserker's mind was completely ruined, but he retained just enough reason to distinguish enemies from allies.

Now that he had changed Masters, his enemy was the Red faction. And standing alone far away from the homunculi and golems was the mad warrior with reason—Berserker of Black.

The ones who could truly be counted as part of their battle power were the ten golems who had been selected for being especially excellent even among Caster's creations and all the other Servants besides Caster.

Caster thought from behind his mask—the situation couldn't be called that disadvantageous for them. Archer's strength and discernment were both excellent, and now that Caster had obtained a [core], his own Noble Phantasm was already capable of being activated.

However, there was but one decisive reason for being confident of their chances of victory.

Because Lancer of Black was *Vlad III*. Here in Romania, and moreover in Transylvania, his fame was nearly at its max. The boost in power due to fame was not that great, but here Vlad III's fame was on the level of devoted piety.

Yes, he was a great hero who had saved his homeland. And he was a terrifying being. The tragic man who, despite being the cornerstone of this nation, was betrayed and lost everything—this county's king who was known by everyone from children to the elderly.

His current form was exceedingly close to that of his heyday. Furthermore, due to his skill [Demonic Defender of the State], the entire surrounding region including these grassland plains had been turned into his personal 'dominion'.

Indeed, Rider of Red's true identity, which they had all heard from Archer of Black yesterday, was certainly shocking and devastating. He was a Servant who boasted of worldwide-class fame and was as top rank as a Heroic Spirit as conceivably possible.

But even so. Even so, Vlad III still had some degree of advantage over him.

The two armies advanced towards each other little by little. As Lancer wondered what Servants the opposing side had, he saw only Dragon Tooth Warriors at the front of their forces.

Puzzled and suspicious, Lancer halted his forces. At the same time, the Dragon Tooth Warriors also stopped moving.

Knowing that trying to talk to the Dragon Tooth Warriors was pointless, Lancer turned his gaze to the floating fortress above.

"—Hmm. What are they planning?"

She couldn't have heard his mutter, but as if in reply—Archer of Red's bow fired the first shot.

***

Archer of Red—Atalanta—nocked two arrows on her favorite bow, Tauropolos. She aimed not at the ground far below, but at the night sky which shined in the faint moonlight.

A chilly and dry late-autumn wind shook her hair, and her animal ears twitched.

It was time.

"With my bow and arrows, I respectfully ask for the divine protection of the sun god Apollo and the moon goddess Artemis."

The arrows started to shine bewitchingly. Her Noble Phantasm wasn't her bow, nor the arrows shot by her bow. Those were both merely the catalysts for it. Her Noble Phantasm was the *technique itself* of nocking and shooting arrows with her bow.

Phoebus Catastrophe

"I offer thee this calamity—**Complaint Message on the Arrow**!"

The two arrows she shot towards the sky pierced through the clouds and disappeared from sight, leaving a glittering trail behind them. This was the starting signal to begin fighting, the first shot.

…Those arrows were a complaint to the gods. The sun god Apollo and the moon goddess Artemis. They were gods deeply connected to the sun and moon respectively. Apollo was the god of the bow and arrow, and Artemis was the goddess of the hunt.

In compensation for Archer requesting divine protection from them, they sought a calamity. In other words, their divine protection equated to—a calamity for the enemy.

A faint light filled the night sky, along with a quiet sound like falling rain. But it wasn't something as simple as a blessed rain. The malevolent gods sought a sacrifice, and scattered a torrential rain under the name of catastrophe.

Arrows of light rained down incessantly from the sky and homunculi were pierced and killed by the arrows one after another. Even the strong and sturdy golems had their bodies smashed apart one after another by the countless arrows. The Black Servant naturally evaded, blocked and repelled the arrows, but their battle line still fell into disorder.

Watching that dreary scene with an extremely cool expression, Archer of Red looked over her shoulder and spoke.

"—With this, the opening move is over. It is time to switch, Rider."

"Yeah!"

Rider struck his knees and ran out with an extremely happy expression, jumping off from the Hanging Gardens. He whistled, and chariot with three steads appeared tearing through the sky and scooped up the falling Rider.

He grasped the reins in the driver's stand and whipped them once. The neighs of the strong-muscled horses roared through the sky above the battlefield.

"Now then, the battle is starting! I, Rider of Red, shall cut through the enemy vanguard!"

Saying so, Rider descended his chariot towards the ground below. Homunculi and golems stood in his path. But both the battle-specialized homunculi and the over one-ton golems pulverized in the path of the immortal divine horses gifted to him by the sea god Poseidon.

The huge chariot was as fast as a bullet and scraped off the ground where it passed. Rider of Red's chariot trampled the battlefield just by riding it.

"Come out, Archer of Black! Show us your power! If you think you can stop this chariot of mine, just try it!"

The ones who answered his provocations weren't any Servants, but golems.

Three golems stepped in front of the fiercely galloping chariot. Clicking his tongue, Rider of Red chose to run them over as if it were natural.

"Out of my way, small fry!"

At those words, Caster of Black, who was watching the battlefield from afar, muttered.

"—Now then. I wonder how that will go, Rider of Red."

The instant Rider's chariot crashed into them, the three golems split apart. Ignoring the surprised Rider, the golems each entwined themselves with the legs of the chariot's horses and then instantly hardened themselves.

"Guh…!!"

Although it continued its mad charge, Rider of Red's chariot finally came to a stop. Seeing that, the homunculi swung the halberds in their hands and jumped at him all at once.

"You impudent little—!"

Removing his hands from the reins, Rider of Red took out his sword from the scabbard at his waist with one hand and swung his hero-slaying spear with the other as he jumped out from the driver's stand.

The confrontation last a single instant. In that moment, Rider took away the lives of every single one of the attacking homunculi. Blood gushed out from them and poured down on the ground like rain.

There's an opening.

There was a single Servant who saw that moment as an opening. Rider's body reacted to the killing intent being directed at him then. But the blood of the homunculi was blocking his vision. Passing through a gap between the corpses, an arrow was shot at the nape of Rider's neck.

"…Kuh!!"

Though his reaction was an instant delayed, Rider of Red's quick-wittedness and agility allowed him to strike down the arrow with his sword. However, he couldn't completely knock it away and even with its trajectory change the arrow still grazed his neck.

Vivid red blood dripped down his neck. His surprise at being wounded was turned into joy instead of humiliation for Rider.

That's right, there was a Servant who could wound him among the Black faction—Archer!

Standing back on the driver's stand, Rider loudly shouted with a majestic and imposing attitude.

"Where is Archer of Black!? I've come to resume our earlier match! Let's fight and kill each other to our heart's content this evening!"

In place of an answer, another arrow was fired at him. But it was an easy matter for Rider to strike down an arrow as long as his vision was not blocked.

"Where are you, Archer of Black!?"

"—I'm closer than you think."

The instant Rider turned around, Archer, who had been hidden behind a golem, fired another arrow while concealing everything but his bow and arrow from sight. Due to having additional prana loaded into it, this arrow was far faster than the ones he shot earlier—!

"Guh…!?"

The arrow was aimed at his face—to be more precise, at his right eye. Rider raised his sword and used its blade to knock away the arrow. But due to that, his vision was momentarily blocked. Taking advantage of that opening, Archer ran and jumped behind a different golem, and then fired another arrow.

"You bastard…!"

Archer never showed himself, and fired arrows one after another at Rider while running around and hiding himself behind golems.

—Archer was baiting him.

Little by little, the golems moved away from the middle of the battlefield. *I see,* Rider thought in understanding. If Rider of Red and his chariot remained on the battlefield, it would turn into a difficult battle for the Black faction.

Naturally, he could just ignore Rider. The interior of a forest was the ideal field for a bowman. He could hide around everywhere and fire arrows. Conversely, fighting in a forest was a fatal situation for Rider. After all, he wouldn't be able to use his crucial chariot within it.

…But that was limited to normal Servants of the Rider class. At the very least, doing this was an obvious mistake when it came to Rider of Red.

Certainly, Rider boasted of extraordinary power when he rode his chariot. It was very difficult to stop his chariot, which was firm and rode like lightning. One of his three steeds was simply a fine and famous horse, but the other two were divine horses bestowed upon him by the sea god Poseidon.

Therefore, if his goal was to defeat the enemy on the battlefield and win, the correct decision would be to ignore Archer's provocations, cut down the golems entangling his chariot, and continue to trample over the enemy battle line.

But that logical plan had a single flaw. Was it right for anyone who called themselves a hero for even an instant to choose the option of running away here?

No, absolutely not. For the sake of the honor of his father who was a great hero, of his mother who was a goddess, and of his eternal friend with whom he shared many joys and sorrows in life, he absolutely could not run away.

While shouting "Wait!", Rider left the battle following Archer. He returned his chariot to its astralized state and headed into the forest on his own two feet. Rider knew that Archer of Black must be laughing at him. After all, Rider let himself be lured into a terrain advantageous to the enemy and negated his own advantages.

…Yes, even now, Rider did not know who Archer was. That is, *he thought he didn't know Archer.* Perhaps he should have been even a little more attentive and considered even the most meager of possibilities.

But it was pointless. There would have been barely any difference whether he wavered before or after *it* happened.

Rider didn't fail to hear the sound of a bowstring being drawn back in preparation to fire an arrow, and searched his surrounding with complete concentration. He could definitely feel the

presence of a Servant. But he couldn't pinpoint their exact location. The only thing he knew for certain was that he was in Archer's attack range.

Rider swore to himself that he wouldn't experience the same humiliation as last time. While walking about, he suddenly stepped on a dead branch. The instant the sound of it breaking resounded through the far too quiet forest—an arrow was fired.

—I already foresaw something like that.

He struck down the arrow with the butt end of his spear. Rider was already capable of reading through the trajectory of Archer's arrows. This was the result of calmly repeating the previous battle in his head and thinking over how to match it with his movements.

"Don't think you can hit me a second or third time, bowman! This time, I'll be the one… heading to you!"

It only took him an instant. He jumped and advanced forward by kicking off the branches of nearby trees. His physical prowess was abnormal, but it wasn't an impossible feat for a Servant. But, even taking into account the fact that he was a Servant, his speed still greatly stood out.

With speed equivalent to instant movement and not worrying about any obstacles in his way, Rider raced towards where the arrow was fired from.

There was suddenly a faint noise. It seemed the enemy had moved as well. As usual, Archer hid amongst the trees, preventing Rider from seeing about him or her anything besides a faint outline. If Archer of Red was in his place, she could use the enemy's scent as one means to track them, but Rider's sense of smell wasn't that strong.

Arrows were fired at him one after another… Their trajectories were far too easy to read and were merely aimed haphazardly. Rider laughed scornfully and repelled them with his spear. It was far too easy for him to parry and dodge them. Rider could really feel that he was cornering him.

The next arrow. Immediately after the next arrow was fired, Rider would corner him—or her.

—Shoot, shoot, shoot, hurry up and shoot!

Rider's wish was granted. He grabbed the next arrow immediately as it was fired and, with a laugh, brought his face close to Archer.

"I got you."

Archer of Black should have been surprised. No, he had to have been surprised. Archer was completely cornered, had any possible attack sealed, and finally had allowed himself to be approached at a fatal distance for a bowman.

And yet, that man was so calm that it made Rider somewhat uneasy. He even smiled at Rider despite how close he was.

————*No, wait.*

————*I've seen this man before.*

————*No, I've talked with him, learned from him, and shared bed and food with him…*

"Y————ou."

"Yes, that is your weak point."

Archer of Black said that in a quiet voice and kicked the man in front of him in the solar plexus. Rider's body went flying back through the air at the strong blow. Landing on the ground, Archer nocked an arrow on his bow with a fluid movement—and fired it.

"…Kuh!!"

Rider understood that the arrow's target was his 'vital point', and immediately he frayed the nerves throughout his entire body. He screwed his body and bent his joints to the limit, trying to at least get it away from the arrow's trajectory.

—He succeeded.

Instead of his vital point, the arrow pierced through his flank. Vivid pain ran through Rider's entire body, but he paid it no heed. The man standing below him was a bigger problem.

All the mysteries surrounding Archer of Black had been cleared up. It was only natural that his skill with the bow was equal to that of Archer of Red—Atalanta. After all, he was a teacher to many heroes including Rider himself.

Rider pulled out the arrow from his flank and tossed it away as he stood up. Archer didn't move even slightly as he held his bow, as if waiting for Rider to speak.

"—Why are you here?"

"What a foolish question. I was summoned as Archer of Black in this Great Holy Grail War. And you were summoned as Rider of Red. We each have wishes and regrets that bind us. That's why we are here. Both me and you."

"…"

Rider cast his eyes down and remained silent. Archer sighed and chided him.

"You're truly soft. Has that part of you alone not been cured from your previous life? You're stern to the end towards those you've acknowledged as enemies, but you're always soft when faced with people who you've already acknowledged as 'good people' when they temporarily cease to be your allies. That may be a lovable trait as a hero. But this is the Great Holy Grail War—there is no room for feeling anything like mercy or compassion. Even someone who is called a hero like you understands that, right?"

—You understand that, right, Achilles?

Archer spoke Rider of Red's true name. The young man known as Achilles nodded once with a grave attitude, like a pupil receiving a lesson.

***

Lancer of Black was unarmed. He wasn't wielding his spear, and merely rode his horse.

Dragon Tooth Warriors became roused up as they sensed the approach of a Servant. It wasn't just one or two hundred of them. A force of over five hundred Dragon Tooth Warriors tried to swarm him.

Of course, a pile of small fry soldiers was no problem at all for a Servant like him. But it would still be foolhardy to plunge straight into the midst of them.

Lancer made his golem horse kick off the ground and jump high through the air. Spreading his arms wide, he declared in a sonorous voice.

"Come, savages who trample over my territory! It's time to discipline you! I'll turn my compassion and rage into red-hot stakes and skewer you all! And these stakes are not limited, but truly infinite, so despair—and gorge on your own blood! **Lord of Execution**!"

Kaziklu Bey

The ground shook slightly. The Dragon Tooth Warriors reflexively looked down. Instantly, long and narrow stakes were summoned forth throughout the surrounding area and shot up out of the ground as if trying to reach the heavens, piercing the warriors one after another. Trees were created upon the grassland plain. The stakes were slender tree trunks, and the leaves and branches were made of bone.

In three seconds since the moment the Noble Phantasm was activated, all five hundred Dragon Tooth Warriors were annihilated.

Lancer ignored them all and merely kept heading straight towards the Hanging Gardens.

…Of course, those who sensed his intention immediately came out to intercept him.

"So you've come."

Lancer sighted two Servants heading towards him at raging speed. One held a bow, and the other held a spear—in other words, they were Archer and Lancer of Red.

While gripped by a strange joy over fighting a Servant of the same class as himself, Lancer of Black aimed at them and summoned his stakes all at once. Stakes shot up one after another upon the grassland plain they ran across. Though she dashed faster and more nimbly than a horse, Archer of Red's speed began to dull.

A stake appeared right before her eyes. Gripping the stake, she coiled her body around it like a monkey and fired an arrow at the horse-mounted Lancer.

But a stake shot out in front of Lancer and blocked the arrow. While still atop his horse, Lancer calmly remained still there. Archer of Red fired another series of arrows, but they were all blocked by stakes that shot out of the ground.

This Lancer was able to protect himself with stakes—Archer of Red had to acknowledge that. These stakes appeared to be his Noble Phantasm. In that case, Father Shirou had been right; this man was Lancer of Black, and his true name was—

"I suppose you're Lancer of Black, Vlad III, right?"

Just as Lancer of Red—Karna said, he was Romania's greatest hero, Vlad III.

"Hoh. Are you, who call me by my true name, Lancer of Red?"

"That's right. Due to circumstances, I shall be taking you down. Do not think ill of me."

"No, no, it is not necessary to think ill of either of us. You people must kill me, as I must kill you all. It is tragic, as that is how reality is. Besides, it is my duty as a king to kill those who invade my country. There is no need to grieve."

A stake shot out of the ground right before Lancer of Red's eyes.

"—Hmm."

But the divine spear that Lancer of Red held easily smashed the stake.

"I see. These stakes really are your Noble Phantasm—but these enormous numbers are abnormal."

Countless Dragon Tooth Warriors had been pierced and hoisted high upon the surrounding stakes. Just like humans who had been left there till the point they turned into skeletons.

Yes, if it was just a matter of the stakes themselves being his Noble Phantasm, it was still fine. Individually, they didn't have that much destructive power and their speed was also slow… But their numbers were too many, already surpassing a thousand. Furthermore, they sprouted out suddenly from the ground, making it difficult to dodge them.

Quantity—that was the greatest characteristic of this Noble Phantasm. The number of stakes he could potentially summon equaled approximately twenty thousand. This Noble Phantasm was already extraordinary in this regard. Certainly, there existed Anti-Army and Anti-Fortress Noble Phantasms that could kill hundreds and thousands of people.

But there were very few that could kill over ten thousand people.

This was not because his Noble Phantasm was a holy sword or divine spear, but rather a reproduction of an [event] that historically occurred—that is, the legend of how he skewered twenty thousand Ottoman Turk soldiers.

Certainly, a single stake might be insufficient and worthless for this Noble Phantasm.

But—an overwhelming number like twenty thousand was overpowering even for Heroic Spirits of valor. While it was nothing short of madness, it was also an elaborate display of military force that none could match. It was an act that was no longer possible for human beings to commit.

Kaziklu Bey
And so this Noble Phantasm is called **Lord of Execution**, the most fearsome Noble Phantasm with the same title as its owner.

"Lancer!"

Archer of Red called out to Lancer of Red. Of course, Lancer also understood it well. Prana was whirling and converging together out from Lancer of Black in front them…!

"Now then, criminals who have trespassed upon my land without permission. It's time for your judgement. Die on the battlefield along with those garbage Dragon Tooth Warriors."

Lancer of Black slightly moved his finger tip—and instantly after.

Stakes suddenly struck out from the ground, aimed at the two Red Servants. Archer promptly avoided them by jumping into the air, but, as if having predicted that, stakes sprang up after her one after another.

Lancer of Red also jumped reflexively. He judged that, if he stepped on the ground, the stakes would aim for his feet. But the stakes sprang up all at once in order to pierce his falling body.

He brandished his divine spear once more—but the stakes he destroyed were replaced by new stakes that seemed to thrust out of the previous ones.

"—Destroying them is meaningless, huh?"

As Lancer of Red gripped his lance with one hand, the stakes struck out to attack him once more. It was just like a muddy stream of stakes. Even so, Lancer of Red dealt with the situation without panicking at all.

Kavacha and Kundala
In the first place, the armor he wore, **O Surya、Become Armor**, was an absolute defensive Noble Phantasm that possessed the radiance of the sun, granted to him by the gods. It easily repelled the stakes of a king.

But—

"What splendid armor you have."

Lancer of Black's voice came from closer than he'd expected. Having equipped with himself a spear in one hand without anyone noticing, Lancer of Black finally arrived near the Red Servants.

Yes. He had *ran atop the stakes* with his golem horse. And while Lancer of Red was trapped by the stakes and unable to move, Lancer of Black moved to pierce the back of his neck with his spear.

"But it's meaningless if I approach this close."

"Lancer…!!"

Archer of Red fired an arrow, but stakes blocked the arrow like protective walls. Not asking for help, unable to even move, Lancer of Red was about to be pierced by the spearhead—and yet, his expression remained completely calm.

The instant Lancer of Black tried to pierce his throat with his spear, Lancer of Red's body began to shine dazzlingly as if to pierce through the night.

The skill possessed by the Heroic Spirit Karna, [Prana Burst]. It had the same name as the skill possessed by Saber of Red, but in his case this skill specialized in [flames].

The stakes that held him and restrained his body were all burnt away. The scene looked as if the flame god Agni had descended upon the earth. A stream of fire formed around Lancer of Red as if to burn away the ground, yet it didn't harm even a single strand of his hair.

Lancer of Red landed upon the now bare ground with a movement that even looked elegant. Watching him, Archer of Red sighed in amazement.

"You should have done that from the beginning."

"It wouldn't have worked as well as you think. My prana consumption as a Servant is quite bad. I can't maintain doing that kind of thing for even ten seconds."

"It's quite troublesome," Lancer of Red added with a sigh. The Heroic Spirit Karna was unmistakably top class. However, with his golden armor that was continuously active, the magnificent divine spear he held, and the [Prana Burst] he used just now, he consumed an extraordinary amount of prana as well. A normal magus probably wouldn't be able to move even a single finger while supporting him. Even a first-rate magus would be exhausted to the point that they couldn't use their own magecraft.

As such, he was grateful that he hadn't received a single complaint from his Master, but he couldn't just take advantage of it either. In that regard, it could be said that Lancer of Red had disciplined himself quite well.

"—It seems you aren't an ordinary Heroic Spirit."

Lancer of Black muttered in a cold voice while dusting soot off himself. There was no sign of even the slightest mental agitation or anger in his countenance.

"Will you surrender?"

"Regardless of whether you're joking or serious, don't spout stupid words, Lancer of Red. As long as I have a wish to ask of the Holy Grail, I will never surrender. Besides—"

Lancer of Black waved his right hand, and an intent to kill oozed out from the surrounding ground. There were still more than enough stakes present, which kept watch on the two Heroic Spirits. Furthermore, the Red Servants could sense that [something] more foreboding had started to move from the distant rear of the Black army.

"Aren't you the ones who should be surrendering? Though, I won't show mercy to you all who are invaders on top of being pagans."

Indeed, Lancer of Red could burn to ash and crush the stakes with his flames and divine spear. But the Red faction's odds of successfully opposing the Black faction's overwhelming amount of material resources were fifty-fifty. Fighting a force of twenty thousand was beyond the capacities of even a mighty Heroic Spirit. Even then, there would have been no problems if they were alive, but right now they were Servants. The more they consumed prana in great quantities, the closer they approached death.

"—That's true. Please forget that joke just now. Let's go, Archer."

"Come."

Lancer of Red swung his divine spear in preparation with both hands and Archer of Red nocked another arrow. Standing in their way was the one who ruled this land, the 'Dracul' Lord.

At the same time as the golem horse neighed, the clash between three Servants recommenced.

***

Though somewhat hesitant, Rider of Black rode his hippogriff towards the Hanging Gardens. The only one who could fly through the sky among the Black faction was himself, so first he should restrain that thing. That was the conclusion he came to after straining his non-existent wisdom.

However, he had one concern. He had summoned the hippogriff and was simply using it as a mount. At this level, its prana consumption wasn't that much. A single homunculus was enough to cover the cost. The problem was if he recited its true name and displayed its full power.

Its prana consumption then would equal that of unleashing the full power of an A rank Noble Phantasm. Moreover, the prana consumption wouldn't decrease after firing it once. It was a Noble Phantasm with an exceedingly bad fuel consumption that would continue expending prana non-stop as long as he continued to keep the hippogriff deployed.

…In his mind, he recalled the homunculi who were being sucked dry of prana without their consent. He remembered Sieg's extremely feeble plea.

After wavering over it for a short while, Rider of Black decided to seal away the use of his Noble Phantasm's true name. After all, right now, he *didn't want to use it*. So he had no choice but to choose an alternative option where he didn't need to use it.

Yes, he truly was a fool. What a foolish thought. And weak as well. He should unleash his Noble Phantasm's true name without minding the homunculi who served as prana batteries. Even Sieg wouldn't condemn Rider for it. He wouldn't ask that much of a Servant who was summoned in order to fight and win.

But Astolfo was that kind of Heroic Spirit. Since he didn't want to do it, he wouldn't do it no matter what anyone said.

"…All right, let's go!"

In front of the floating fortress, Rider lightly clapped the nape of the hippogriff's neck with his usual carefree manner. The hippogriff responded with a shrill bird-like cry and strongly flapped

its wings. And so it flew forward—with particles of light flowing out from the wings along with a raging wind and lighting up the air, like countless fireflies, before disappearing immediately after.

Rider flew towards the Hanging Gardens… Though naturally, the mistress of the floating fortress wouldn't allow his thoughtless actions.

"—Hoh, it seems the other faction's Rider also has a mount that can fly across the heavens. In that case, these ones I've prepared won't go to waste then."

The only remaining person within the floating fortress—the **Hanging Gardens of Babylon**—Assassin of Red, smiled faintly and released 'them' into the sky.

"Go, ugly winged ones. Fly and devour the enemy to your hearts' content."

Along with those words, countless big humanoid [things] flew off from the gardens all at once.

Rider flew across the sky over the battlefield. He saw that the second powerful clash between the two armies had already begun. Dragon Tooth Warriors, homunculi and golems. Additionally, the other Servants were clashing with each other and fighting life-or-death struggles.

"All right. I have to work hard too…!"

As Rider renewed his fighting spirit, monsters appeared and swooped down to attack him with good timing. Their upper halves were the same as the Dragon Tooth Warriors, but these had wings sprouting from their back and their lower halves were clearly bird-like.

"Harpies…? No, modified versions combined with Dragon Tooth Warriors?"

Harpies, avarice-filled flying beasts, were creatures that couldn't help being easily led astray by their appetite, possessing cruel habits and a cowardly nature that made them unsuitable as soldiers. But Assassin of Red had fused them with Dragon Tooth Warriors. Rather than Dragon Tooth Warriors, perhaps it would be more appropriate to call these Dragon Wing Warriors. Either way, considering they were named after 'dragons', they were very thin and ugly-looking soldiers.

But they were great in numbers. The sight of over a hundred Dragon Wing Warriors attacking down was just like the scene of a sky burial with birds rushing to eat the offered corpse. With their claws sharper than metal, they swooped down all at once to eliminate the insolent intruder who sought to trespass on the gardens.

—But they were facing the worst possible opponent for them.

After all, their enemy was a hippogriff, a creature counted among the Phantasmal Species. There was no way it would lose to mere small fry like them. And the one who rode it was also the worst possible enemy for them as well.

Rider of Black, Astolfo of Twelve Paladins of Charlemagne. He, who had gone through many adventures, possessed various Noble Phantasms that displayed effects under restricted conditions. His lance that specialized in throwing down the enemy, his book that destroyed all magecraft, and a phantasmal steed that possessed *a power worthy of special mention in regards to a certain point*.

And the hunting horn he currently held in his hand was the most extreme of his Noble Phantasms.

"Please line up in a row, won't you? Here we go—**Magic Flute That Calls Panic**!"
La Black Luna

Along with that shout that contained no tension at all, the hunting horn hanging from his waists expanded and became huge.

"Disappear!"

He sucked in a huge breath—and then released it all in one breath into the horn. The high-pitched call of the horn resounded through the battlefield. All homunculi and Dragon Tooth Warrior instantly looked up at the sky above.

The roar of a dragon, the cry of a giant bird, the neigh of a divine horse—an enchanted sound which was comparable to all those things made the Dragon Wing Warriors, who should have numbered over a hundred, vanish like mist in an instant. They had been literally blown away. It wasn't something as simple as "The harpies ran away in fear after hearing that sound" as told of in myths. The horn was a genuine weapon of wide-scale destruction.

"All right, straight ahead, straight ahead. Let's go!"

Hanging his now miniaturized horn back on his waist, Rider of Black once more gripped the reins with both hands—

—Things won't go that well for you, lovely battle maiden.

He noticed a black-clad woman standing at the front of the gardens. She was without a doubt a Servant. Rider of Black guessed her class based on her clothes.

"…You took to be Caster of Red! Prepare yourself!"

The black-clad Servant smiled wryly at Rider of Black's shout.

"I'm afraid you're mistaken. I am Assassin of Red. However—just as you surmised, I have some small amount of confidence in my skill with magecraft. Let me test to see if you have the qualifications to enter my [gardens]."

She snapped her fingers once. Instantly, waves of prana unfolded around her. Perhaps due to the spell having already been set up beforehand, shining purple magic circles that gave the impression of pre-loaded cannons suddenly appeared in the air around her.

"Ah, by the way, there are more of these above and below. Please be careful."

Rider of Black reflexively looked at the sky above and below and was left dumbfounded. The magic circles weren't limited to just the four that had appeared around her. There were four more above him and four more below. They were all loaded with huge amounts of prana and were impatiently waiting for Assassin's order—!

"—Fall."

With the order to fire given, the cannons fired all at once. With sounds similar to ferocious roars, pillars of light easily broke through the barrier of the air and shot at Rider of Black.

"Just try it…!!"

Luna Break Manual

Rider of Black had the continuously-active type Noble Phantasm, **Universal Magic Guide**—though the name was just temporary—and as such was granted A rank Magic Resistance. In practice, this effectively meant that he couldn't be harmed by modern magi.

That's why he chose to attack like this. If he didn't have that book, even he would falter over conducting a direct assault.

But Rider of Black did not know. The Assassin in front him actually possessed a rule-breaking double class that allowed her to simultaneously act as the Caster class as well. And she was currently standing in the **Hanging Gardens of Babylon**, a great Noble Phantasm which surpassed the highest-grade [Temple] that could be created with the class skill [Territory Creation] of the Caster class.

In other words, she had basically barricaded herself in a solid fortress that deployed fiendish weapons of mass destruction. Approaching her was the same as throwing oneself before her to be killed.

Unable to dodge, his entire body was struck by EX rank blasts of prana, and as if unsatisfied with just that, the blasts ransacked the inside of his body and relentlessly and thoroughly violated him.

"Kuaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!!"

The hippogriff vanished with that cry, and Rider of Black fell towards the ground below. Watching him fall, Assassin of Red murmured with sober eyes.

"What's this? I did say to fall, but even so, there's a limit to how quickly you should be defeated. How boring. I thought you had a bit of promise when you instantly annihilated my Dragon Wing Warriors, but—"

She switched her gaze to the battle below. Seen from above, the flow of battle seemed to be going back and forth between the two sides. Their Rider was facing Archer of Black, while Lancer and Archer were facing Lancer of Black. And her own Master, Shirou was—

"…Hoh."

A smile peeked through her expression as she watched that particular scene. Though it was regrettable that his opponent was Berserker, his expression didn't look perturbed at all.

"Very well then. Show me, Shirou, the first bright and clear battle campaign of my Master."

***

Berserker of Black, Frankenstein, didn't show it much in her expression, but she was troubled.

Obeying her orders, she had at first prowled the battlefield looking for enemy Servants, and she had leapt into the forest after seeing a human figure there, but what she found there wasn't a Servant, but instead—

"It seems you're my opponent, *Frankenstein*. The sorrowful monster created by humans in pursuit of an ideal. In a certain sense, you are both a turning point and a midway being that should be aimed for."

The one who whispered those strange words as if subtly mistaking the situation was a human. He didn't seem to be a Servant. But was the man before her eyes really a human being?

For some reason, Berserker of Black's intuitive perception was vague on that point.

"Uu——"

Dragon Tooth Warriors were attacking her, but she dealt with them easily. On the other hand, since they never laid a hand on the man in front of her, she was able to comprehend that he was on the enemy side.

But even so. Why did he know her true name?

Just like how her Master Caules had been surprised, Frankenstein was generally recorded as being male, and a huge man who could stab the clouds at that. So it shouldn't be possible for anyone to guess her identity based on her appearance.

…Had he met her during her lifetime?

That was also impossible. She was a young Heroic Spirit who had been born right at the very end of the era when mysteries could still come into existence. There were few people who had lived in the same era as her that could have become Heroic Spirits, and even if there were, she had never chanced upon meeting any of them.

So then, had someone exposed her true name to the enemy…?

"Yes, you truly are distinct. Though a Berserker, you retain a certain degree of higher-order thought. Truly a modern Heroic Spirit."

While giving a carefree smile, the man held out his hand to Berserker.

"I know and understand you quite well. How about it? Would you be interested in coming over to our side to replace Berserker of Red?"

At those words, Berserker became filled with wariness and growled menacingly. The man let his hand fall back down with a bitter smile.

"That's useless, my Master."

Berserker's wariness increased further. Behind the man, this time someone who was clearly a Servant appeared. There was a thin amount of prana being emitted from him—and his clothing was hardly suited for a battle. Was this the enemy Caster?

"Oh my, how rude. I have no intention to fight in the least. The one who will fight is this Master here. I merely watch over and support him."

Saying such a thing that was unbecoming of a Servant—he took one step back as if to use the Master as a shield. There was no sign of him using any magecraft to attack. Unbelievably, it seemed this Master… truly intended to fight her one-on-one.

"That's right. The one to fight will be I, Shirou Kotomine."

The instant he let his arms dangle at his side, [hilts] appeared between each of his fingers. Berserker couldn't tell what kind of weapons they were with her scarce knowledge.

But those who had seen them before would probably immediately recognize them. They were Conceptual Weapons that dispensed purification and took the form of blades compiled out of prana, known as [Black Keys].

"—If you ever feel like coming over to our side, please feel free to accept my offer at any time."

Saying that with a smile, Shirou launched off the Black Keys.

"…!?"

While leaping backwards, Berserker swatted the Black Keys with her weapon, the **Bridal Chest**.

"—Naaaaaaaaaaaaaaaoooooooh!!"

With that, her mind was settled. No matter the circumstances, this Master was facing her as an enemy. Regardless of whether it was a trap or not, she didn't think it would handicap her too much in this situation. Of course, she made sure to never to let herself lower her guard against the nearby materialized Caster. Even then, she didn't think she was at a disadvantage.

Berserker did a complete spin and then plunged forward at full speed. Four more Black Keys were thrown from the man's hands. They moved at a splendid speed for weapons thrown by a human, and if she were attacked by them with her guard down, she would probably be skewered.

But there was no point in throwing them at her right from the front with such unrefined skill. She repelled them once more and advanced further forward.

"—As expected of a hero like you."

He praised her with a relaxed expression. Irritation slightly gushed forth in Berserker's mind. Let's test out whether he would continue acting composed like this even after she smashed that face of his—!

"—Announce[Set]."

Instantly, impacts like lightning strikes ran through her surroundings. She immediately turned herself along with her **Bridal Chest** around 380 degrees—the Black Keys she should have repelled had returned, aiming at her once again. It seemed such a spell had been inserted into the hilts beforehand.

"How disappointing."

Was Shirou's murmur directed at himself? Or—were those words directed at her for knocking them down in a disappointing manner?

It makes no difference, Berserker thought, instantly discarding that train of thought. From the beginning, she couldn't put up with complex thoughts for long periods of time. She just thoroughly, determinedly and honestly advanced forward…!

"Now then. Caster, I'll use it now."

Shirou said that and held out his hand in the air. Suddenly, his personal weapon was summoned into his hand with a burst of prana. As Berserker charged, her gaze focused on the Japanese blade stored in an iron scabbard. At the same time, she felt unbelievable shock. With an enormous amount of prana converging within it, that blade was clearly—a Noble Phantasm!

"Yes, yes. Please go ahead! Use it to your heart's content! Like a tempest accompanied by raging flames! Like a torrential rain accompanied by lightning! The eternally continuing story begins now!"

Along with Caster's excited shout, Shirou ran forward. He instantly pulled out the sword from the scabbard in his left hand, sunk into a deep posture and thrust the blade forward.

"Uuuuuuuuu!!"

Caught off guard as she charged, Berserker had a patch of skin torn off from her body. That fact made her truly realize that the blade he held was no ordinary object. There weren't many weapons that could wound a Servant's body.

Berserker swung her mace. It turned into a frantic dance of slashes and strikes. A normal sword would probably break or bend if it received a direct hit from her mace, but the blade did not receive a single scratch no matter how many blows were exchanged.

He didn't fight with artistic skill and talent. Shirou's sword technique was almost average. He was above the level of a rank-and-file warrior, but he was far from being a master. But in that case, why were he and Berserker even with each other as they exchanged blows?

…It's true that Berserker wasn't a Heroic Spirit who had won fame as an embodiment of martial prowess. She was a being that fought ferociously and brutally as a Heroic Spirit due to her origins. But even so, her basic specs were exceptional. Able to create an infinite cycle by reproducing a pseudo-Type II Perpetual Motion Machine, she could continue moving at full power in any kind of situation. She would never run out of breath and tire, *unlike* a human. She would continue hitting perpetually without breathing until the enemy fell—that was precisely why she was given the title of the mad warrior Berserker.

Yes, any being who was able exchange blows with that Perpetual Motion Machine head-on could not be called 'human'. Of course, since this man was the mediator sent from the Church, he had to be human, and it would be natural to simply say he had accumulated a lot of training.

But even so, the power he displayed stood out too much. Berserker felt a feeling of unease settle in the pit of her stomach.

She brandished her mace and instantly swung it down—but he dodged it. If it was that alone, *it would have been fine*. It wasn't an unavoidable attack for one who had reached the peak in the domain of magecraft. The problem was how he dodged it. Someone who could give faint smile in this situation, without caring about the fact that her mace, which could crush and knock off his

head like a tomato, had just passed in front of his nose by a literally paper-thin distance of only a few milimeters, *wasn't human*.

I don't like that smile, Berserker thought. *I don't like those eyes,* Berserker thought. *But most of all—I can't stand his existence!*

Shirou widened the distance between them with a single jump backwards. He gripped his blade in one hand and held Black Keys in the other.

The mad artificial human pushed through the rain of thrown Black Keys without the slightest hesitation.

***

Choosing the moment when Lancer of Black began fighting against two other Servants from the Red faction, Caster of Black released Berserker of Red. Right now, Lancer of Black was the cornerstone of their faction. Caster of Black judged that he mustn't be allowed to die.

"Berserker. I am your Master. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand. It seems I can't continue existing without your power. What an unforgivable enslavement."

"…Then will you kill me?"

"But I can't kill you. After all, I have a mission for which I must remain in this present era for even a little bit longer. I must strike down the oppressors and grasp the hope that lies at the end of despair. And finally, I must slaughter all those greedy powerful people who have gathered in search of the Holy Grail."

"I see. But in order to do that, you must first annihilate the enemy side. Go, Berserker. Your opponents are oppressors and the hounds of those in power. That should be sufficient motive for you."

Caster released the seal on Berserker. Unable to endure it even a moment longer, Berserker struggled out of his binds and finally took a step forward.

The instant he regained his freedom, he turned towards Caster with a gentle smile like the calm sea. But Caster didn't react at all. Due to the mask he wore, it was impossible to tell whether he was afraid or even felt any emotion at all.

"…Hmph."

Seeming to have lost interest in Caster, Berserker of Red turned to face the battlefield. Happily taking a deep breath, he began walking towards the battlefield with his sword that was far bigger than a standard gladius in his hand.

Watching him leave, Caster sighed in exasperation. If he had acted too high-handed, Berserker probably would have withdrawn his previous words (since there was no other Servant as fickle as Berserker) and killed him.

"I'm weak, after all… I would have been killed by a single blow from him."

Though his skin was as pale as a corpse, that man was composed of nothing but muscle. He would probably trample through the battlefield and throw the battle into chaos like a demon, returning everything to nothing.

"Now then, next is—"

Caster had one remaining duty. That was to choose the timing to sacrifice the magus they had chosen and activate his Noble Phantasm. He had Darnic's permission, so there were no problems in that regard… He felt confident about his own abilities, but he still felt some unease over how far he would really be able to go when up against the best chosen Heroic Spirits. But if he couldn't overcome them, he wouldn't be able to accomplish his wish.

The wish that Caster of Black, Avicebron, wanted to entrust to the Holy Grail was complicated. Normally, Heroic Spirits fought and killed one another as they advanced through the Holy Grail War in order to grant their wishes. But the circumstances of his case were slightly different.

His wish was to complete his Noble Phantasm, **Royal Crown, the Light of Wisdom** (Golem Keter Malkuth). Then wouldn't his wish be granted once he activated his Noble Phantasm?

No, it wouldn't. In the first place, golems were a part of the Kabbalah style of magecraft, with the word meaning 'embryo' or 'moulded being'. Therefore, golems were nothing other than an attempt to reproduce the secret mystery of how God created the human Adam.

In other words, even if it was completed as a Noble Phantasm, it would still be *incomplete*. Even if it could wield unparalleled power, it wouldn't be a truly perfected existence.

A great king who would lead us humans filled with hardship and suffering to the Garden of Eden once more—that was the role he sought in the supreme golem.

He had assembled nearly all the necessary materials. All that was left was the final [core]; in other words, a magus. It would have been great if they could have at least captured that homunculus, but he wouldn't ask for too much.

'—Master!'

Caster heard a voice from far away. When he turned around and looked up, he saw his Master Roche standing on the castle ramparts and waving his arm innocently at him. Though Caster could see him, Roche was obviously too far for his voice to reach him, so he used telepathic communication.

'I believe coming out like that is dangerous for you…'

'Yes! Umm, when you come back… won't you please look at my golems!? I think I managed to make the latest batch well this time!'

Caster nodded in an impressed manner. The boy's passion for golems was quite something. When he was given advice, he would immediately try to correct those points and aim to make them better. Back in Caster's lifetime, Roche might have been able to serve as his pupil with his outstanding talent.

Most of all, Caster liked that there was a family lineage that still continued to pass on the mysteries of golem-making that he and his forefathers had created.

'I'll look it over if there's time.'

'Y…Yes!'

Roche seemed like he still wanted to say more, but he finally hanged his head as if embarrassed and drew back into the castle.

"Even so, I'm bad with children."

In the first place, Caster had suffered from many illnesses during his life, and had spent his days with almost zero contact with other humans. He had even purposefully created maid-type golems to take care of the housework in order to maintain his isolation.

As a result, he had never had any contact with children, and as such, this situation where a child adored and idolized him like this was simply baffling and uncomfortable for him.

How ironic. He, who was trying to create the original human Adam in order to reproduce God's miracle, couldn't help disliking humans.

"—Good grief."

It would be a lie to say that Caster felt no hesitation over using a magus as the [core]. Even so, completing his Noble Phantasm was Caster's dearest wish. Therefore, it was necessary to have the resolution to sacrifice everything for the sake of winning.

And besides, he had received permission from Darnic. That man—Gordes Musik Yggdmillennia would probably be passingly adequate as the [core]. Caster personally wanted to aim to for

something better to use as his Noble Phantasm, but there were no other options besides him available.

Caster felt just a little disappointment over that.

***

Berserker of Red ignored all the Dragon Tooth Warriors that bit at him, and savagely attacked Lancer and Archer of Red. The reason he attacked wholeheartedly like this was probably because of Lancer of Black.

Though he had switched his Master and changed factions, Berserker would have undoubtedly attacked Lancer if he weren't restrained by Caster's Command Spell. His unconscious desire to do so had naturally led him to the fiercest scene of battle on this battlefield.

Berserker of Red was truly like a time bomb, but his strength was great enough to invoke fear even in other Servants.

"Tch. I knew I should have shot his tendons back then…!!"

As she said that, Archer of Red repeatedly shot a strafing of arrows. Her arrows, fired at the same speed as a machine gun, all hit their target. Berserker's knees now looked like hedgehogs.

With a strange sound, Berserker of Red's knees changed to an eerie color like that of overly ripened persimmons, but Berserker didn't fall.

"—Archer. Please take care of Berserker. I'll take care of this lord of impalement, Kaziklu Bey, here."

Lancer of Red said that to Archer while crossing spears with Lancer of Black.

"Roger. Hmph… Now that I think about it, you are quite a pitiful creature, Berserker!"

Since he was participating in this Great Holy Grail War, Berserker had to subordinate himself under someone. There might also occasionally be cases where he would have to fight as the dog of some tyrant… If he had been summoned in the Saber class as a proper swordsman, would he have been able to endure the humiliation of that?

That's why, if he was going to fight with the Holy Grail as the prize, he couldn't be anything but a high-risk Berserker. And his Mad Enhancement was deteriorated to the point of being beyond saving. Most likely, no matter which Holy Grail War he was summoned in, he would never be able to have his wish granted.

But even so, he smote evil while laughing. He searched for the path of rebellion even while being tormented. A hopeless destroyer who pursued the way of suffering. That was precisely the kind of person Spartacus was.

Archer of Red therefore deemed him pitiful as she shot her arrows at him. To her, Berserker was merely big. Both the blows of his gladius swung by his strong arm and his charge were equivalent to motionless in the face of her beast-like speed. But Berserker's steel-like muscles didn't falter at all despite being pierced by several arrows.

"So tough… Then how about this!"

Archer stopped trying to maintain distance between them and vigorously ran forward. She dodged the sweeping slash that came to intercept her by sliding on the ground. As if it were chasing after her, **Lord of Execution** Kaziklu Bey shot stakes to pierce her in rapid succession, but they didn't reach Archer as she dashed forward at full power.

As she passed through the space between Berserker's feet, Archer fired arrows at his lower jaw, windpipe, solar plexus and abdomen in a single instant.

"Hahahaha! Not enough! Not enough! Nooooot eeeeeeeeenoooooough!!!"

But Berserker simply turned around and kicked Archer in the stomach with all his might. Hit with an impact equal to that of a direct hit from a cannon ball, Archer was sent flying twenty meters away through the surrounding Dragon Tooth Warriors and homunculi.

"Guuuh…!"

Fortunately, she'd managed to jump back and escape by a hair's breadth right before the kick fully hit. If she hadn't, it wouldn't have been strange if the impact had been strong enough to tear off her upper body from the rest.

While agonizing over her carelessness, Archer watched as Berserker approached her. Despite all the arrows she'd shot at him, his mad charge hadn't changed at all.

But my arrows should have hit him…

It was possible for high-ranking Heroic Spirits like Rider of Red, who was beloved by the gods, to negate attacks with their skills or Noble Phantasms. She herself also personally knew a hero who possessed just such an ability that was nearly foul play in the form of a Noble Phantasm that completely negated all attacks below a certain rank.

But there was no such ability among Berserker of Red's Noble Phantasm and skills that Shirou had informed her about. Of course, it was possible that the priest hadn't told her about it. But in this situation where Berserker was clearly facing them as an enemy, Shirou had no reason to hide such information.

And besides, most importantly, her arrows had definitely pierced him. She had received such feedback from them. Perhaps irritated by them, Berserker sometimes pulled out the arrows that pierced him, but he was definitely covered in wounds all over his body.

Yes, there was even blood flowing from them. She was definitely wounding him. Then, he must simply be enduring them. Perhaps she had merely underestimated his extraordinary stamina.

No… something is strange here.

She was a girl who had spent all her life doing nothing but fighting and hunting. Even as she was nocking another arrow, she observed Berserker's body from afar and finally noticed it.

His wounds were healing. Rather than healing, though, it was more like over-regeneration. The pierced parts of his body swelled and bulged like tumors. Archer's arrows should have pierced holes throughout his body. Then this meant—

"Impossible, is he… *becoming bigger* !?"

It wasn't just that. She could feel a torrent of prana from him that was greater than it was before. While clad in a dense concentration of prana all over his body, Berserker swung his sword with strength and speed greater than earlier—!

"Tch…!!"

Archer jumped as she avoided the downward slash by a paper-thin distance. She jumped upon Berserker's arm and ran straight towards his face.

"—Then I'll take your head!"

Standing atop Berserker's shoulder, Archer fired arrow after arrow at the nape of his neck. Thanks to her innate sense of balance, she didn't fall no matter how much Berserker swung around, and she crawled around his back and, grabbing one of arrows that had pierced him, continued using it to slash his neck.

When the sound of blood gurgling out began, she stopped and put away the arrow, and then firmly stepped on Berserker's shoulder with both her feet and pulled up his neck with all her might. At the sound of flesh tearing off as she did so, Berserker began running amuck even more in rage.

Tripping on the blood gushing out, Archer fell to the ground. She rolled over and reset her stance, and looked over to confirm the state of Berserker's body—and was naturally left dumbfounded.

"…This is a bad dream."

Archer's mutter was only natural. Berserker's neck, which should have been torn off, had flesh bulging from it like a spout of bubbles. It was an extremely disgusting and even slightly

ridiculous sight. And Archer could tell that the prana overflowing from inside him had increased even further.

Crying Warmonger
Berserker of Red, Spartacus' Noble Phantasm, **Howl of the Wounded Beast**—an Anti-Unit Noble Phantasm that affects the user, which converts part of the damage received into prana and uses the accumulated energy to boost one's abilities.

"But I did not hear anything about it grotesquely morphing even his physical form… guh!"

His neck now looking like a turtle's, Berserker grinned with wide open eyes. While dodging the lash-like attacks of his swinging arms, Archer shot at his hand holding his sword this time in order to tear it off. Once three arrows had dug into his wrist, the gladius finally fell from his hand.

Archer fiercely sprinted forward and picked up his sword, and then swung it with both her hands to stab it into the back of the Berserker's writhing hand and plant it in the ground.

He didn't cry out, but his movements stopped due to being deeply stabbed. If his wrist had been torn off he could have escaped, but unfortunately, due to his excessive regeneration, his wrist had already undergone adhesion.

"All right, don't move for a while."

Archer looked around to confirm that there were no Dragon Tooth Warriors, homunculi or golems in the surrounding region, and then nocked another two arrows and fired them into the sky.

She limited the targeted area as much as possible and focused the arrows onto a single point. She was going to use her Noble Phantasm a second time, but this was currently the optimum choice among the attack options she had, so it couldn't be helped.

…Fortunately, her Master dud not utter a word of complain either.

Phoebus Catastrophe
"I offer thee this calamity—**Complaint Message on the Arrow**!"

Berserker of Red stared at the sky and smiled. A shining ran fell down to purify him.

His entire body was thoroughly torn apart and finely hashed up. Muscle tissue, skin, blood vessels, nerves; all of it was damaged. Even a superior Servant wouldn't be able to escape from being in a near-death state after that. Instantaneous healing was impossible even with a Master who was a first-rate magus.

But—

"…No way."

As if in response to Archer's mutter of mute amazement, the torn-up lump of meat in front of her began squirming.

***

Achilles. A great hero who rivaled the legendary Greek hero Heracles in terms of fame. There were probably less than ten heroes, including him, whose names were known on a global scale. However, the number of people decreased when it came to those who knew the story of the rushed and short life of this great sprinter.

Born from the sea goddess Thetis and the hero Peleus, Achilles was blessed by the gods from birth. His mother Thetis, having greatly loved her son, had warmed him within holy flames in order to try and make him immortal. But her husband Peleus had opposed it, saying "Then that would destroy Achilles as a human", and in the end Achilles grew up while *just a certain part of him* remained human.

Eventually, when war broke out between Troia and Achaea, Achilles was asked the following by his mother Thetis.

—Do you wish to live a long and peaceful life without having your name recognized by the masses? Or do you wish to live the short life of a hero with brilliant achievements in battle?

Achilles' choice went without saying. At the same time as his mother felt pride in his decision, she also felt heartbreakingly sad. Because his fate had been predetermined since he was born. If he lived as a hero, he would have a short life, as if *sprinting through it at full speed*.

After having grown up, he participated in the Trojan War as part of the Achaean army and continued achieving many great feats. His body, blessed by all the gods, never received any wounds, and the spear that his father had given to him pierced through all other heroes. With his chariot led by three steeds, consisting of two divine horses given to him as a gift from the sea god and a famous horse he stole while assaulting a certain city, no one could chase after him from behind.

But during the one-on-one fight between Achilles and the greatest hero in the Trojan War, Hector, who was equal in strength and skill with Achilles, his weak point was exposed. Even if Hector was the killer of Achilles' close friend Patroclus, the way Achilles insulted him by dragging his corpse around with his chariot was a foolish and intolerable act.

As a result, he incurred the displeasure of the sun god Apollo, but despite being repeatedly warned by him to restrain himself, Achilles continued slaughtering the Trojan army. So the enraged Apollo aided the Trojan army's bow expert Paris, and guided him to shoot Achilles' only weak point—that is, his heel.

Having his heart pierced by arrows one after another afterwards, Achilles sensed his own death, but continued fiercely fighting and using all his strength to kill the soldiers of the Trojan army around him. Just as predicted, he had a short life, but his legend as a hero was carved into the world.

A human who was exceedingly close to the level of the gods, a fast-sprinting hero with an invincible body. But his heel alone—was this hero's vital weak point.

And Archer of Black, Chiron, served as Achilles' teacher. When Achilles was a young child, his mother Thetis returned to her home at the bottom of the sea due to discord with his father Peleus. Chiron, who had raised many heroes, was an old friend of Peleus, and happily accepted the role of training Achilles.

…Yes. It was only natural that Achilles had wavered for an instant. Chiron had been an absolute figure and symbol to his younger self. His gentleness, seriousness and words had been engraved like magic into the child Achilles.

For nine years—Chiron was a father, teacher, older brother and close friend whom he spent his childhood with, when he was at his most sensitive. For Achilles, who was the son of a hero, had received the blessings of the Olympian gods and had been given looks of awe, respect and admiration from many young warriors, there were few people he could truly call his friends or teachers.

Chiron was, beyond a doubt, one of those few people. He was someone Achilles could trust just as much as his close friend Patroclus.

That hero was now blocking his way in search for the Holy Grail.

As Archer of Black, as an enemy, and as an opponent to be killed—

"—Here I come, master."

"Such words are unnecessary, *Rider of Red*."

Though he withered slightly at being spurned by those harsh words, Rider of Red fiercely swung his spear. The two of them began fighting while keeping sufficient distance between them to talk

with each other. In other words, the bowman was allowing the attacking lightly-armored warrior to get up close to him.

Even while Rider was gripped by a little regret, his spear tip didn't dull and aimed at the enemy's heart. However, with reckless courage like that of a mad warrior who knew no fear, Archer of Black took a step forward at the same time as the spear was thrust.

The skill of the famous fast-sprinter Achilles with the spear was so great that he would have no trouble being summoned as a Lancer. Normally speaking, he would have had easily gouged out Archer's heart.

But Rider had fatally forgotten one point.

Instead of gouging his enemy's heart, his spear tip ended up passing by Archer's flank.

"Wha…!!"

"Did you forget, Rider? Who gave you this spear and taught you the basics of using it?"

Rider received a shock from Archer's words. Just as he said, Rider hadn't refined his spear skills with self-taught training. In the beginning, he was taught the basics by his teacher Chiron. Therefore, it was only natural that Archer would see through all his body's movements and habits. Furthermore, this spear was originally given to his father Peleus as a wedding gift for him and his wife, so he could also completely grasp its distance and reach.

And Archer had displayed an even more shocking technique than that. At the same time as he stepped forward, he had nocked an arrow on his bow. Truly a quick draw. He had set up an unavoidable shot from zero-distance.

"—You're going to die, you know, Rider?"

Fixing his aim on Rider's skull, Archer fired the arrow without hesitation. Rider bent backwards right away to dodge it. With movements capable of unbelievable quickness and readiness, he managed to just barely avoid it so it only grazed his skin.

But then Archer shot a kick at him at that moment. With his stance destroyed, Rider was blown away and impacted against a tree. The instant the distance between them had widened, Archer nocked and fired another arrow.

Within Rider, some kind of switch was thrown. Gritting his teeth, he glared at Archer with determined eyes. He ran straight towards the arrow Archer fired at him. Dodging the arrow by bending forward, he swung his spear in a sweeping slash—but Archer dodged it.

A feeling of joy ran down his spine. Howling fiercely, he thrusted his spear again and again. Archer dodged the continuous bullet-like spear attacks and nocked more arrows while skillfully controlling the distance between them.

It was impossible for a bowman to fight at close range, and if Rider could get him within the range of his spear, he would win. Rider was furious at his own shallowness for thinking that. His opponent was Chiron, the great sage who had taught not only Rider himself, but other heroes that were like shining stars, such as Heracles, Jason, Castor, and Asclepius.

Getting close up only made them equal. From this point on, if Rider didn't muster everything he had into his attacks even further, his defeat would be inevitable…!

Rider attacked Archer while thrusting, slashing and cleverly using feints with his spear. Archer avoided the attacks and occasionally defended with his bow, and furthermore, added in his own kicks and punches while shooting arrows whenever there was an opening.

Rider's body was greatly wounded by Archer's point-blank shots. Even with his body blessed by the gods, he was defenceless against the attacks of Archer who possessed the same [Divinity] as him.

All of Rider's attacks were read, while on the other hand he couldn't read his opponent's attacks well. He somehow managed to maintain a balance in the fight with his natural sturdiness, but at this rate he would end up being driven into a corner.

Rider detached his thoughts from the battle before him for a moment. The reason his techniques were being read was because he had learned the basics from the very Archer in front of him. Everything from setting his stance to timing his thrusts to making sweeping slashes with his spear.

—Don't be deceived.

It was true that Archer had taught him the basics. But Rider hadn't managed to keep winning since the time he threw himself into battle at a young age with just the basics. He had learned how to apply those techniques in a fight and how to survive in the midst of desperate battles. He had fought many heroes and sharpened his skills in the process.

How had he found a way to survive in every battle and critical situation? Yes, like that time he—

Rider's movements changed. He stopped using basic techniques and trying to overwhelm his opponent with his overwhelming speed, and instead started changing his attacks with tricky moves.

Just when he seemed to let go of his spear, he kicked Archer and sent him flying using his own fatal weak point, his heel.

He then kicked up his spear as it fell and grabbed it once more in the air, and then fixed his aim and thrusted with it. The spear grazed against Archer's neck, causing blood to spout out.

"Kuh…!!"

Finding himself deeply cornered, Archer widened the distance between them. Rider waved his spear as if to say, "How's that?"

As their eyes met, they both gave fearless smiles.

"—Hmm. So you really did earn your place as a Heroic Spirit."

"Of course. Unlike you who simply taught others, I ran through numerous battlefields, after all."

He had crossed blades, fought to the death and exchanged friendships of the soul with many heroes. It was true that he had learned the basics from Chiron. But the corpses that Rider had piled up in battle—were also another truth for him.

"No, I'm really glad. It would have left a bad aftertaste in my mouth if I one-sidedly slaughtered a student of mine."

Archer smiled, and Rider smiled in return.

Rider had already thrown away his hesitation over fighting against his teacher. All that was left was the joy of a death match against a strong opponent.

Rider wavered over whether or not he should close the distance between them. It was standard tactics for him to charge at his enemy, but this might be a good time to throw away those standard tactics.

The main purpose of the spear he held was originally for throwing. It was a weapon that destroyed all defenses and pierced the chests of heroes. Chiron understood the fearsomeness of that spear better than anyone else. After all, he was the one who had given it away as a gift.

—Now then, what to do?

Their gazes met. Both Rider of Red and Archer of Black planned their next moves while watching each other's every action.

Rider smiled, and Archer smiled in return. There was definitely a bond between them. Teacher and student, friend and friend who trusted each other from the bottom of their hearts. Even if they trampled on those feelings, vast 'joy' over facing each other that surpassed their other feelings definitely existed in their hearts.

***

—Rider of Black by no means had a tough or sturdy body. His stamina was just as could be imagined from his showy appearance.

"Owowow…"

Even so, he wasn't all that wounded by the damage from the fall and blasts of prana. That was probably because of—the immense effect of his Noble Phantasm **Universal Magic Guide** (Temporary Name).

Luna Break Manual

"—Ah man, I give up. What should I do now?"

His hippogriff wasn't dead. It had been injured, but since he sent it back right away, it would be able to recover. But he wouldn't be able to use it again in this battle.

When he thought back on it, he couldn't deny that he'd been a bit too impatient. If he had completely released his hippogriff's power, he definitely could have gotten through that magic attack.

The reason he wasn't able to do that—was because he had decided not to.

"Ah, geez!"

He scratched his head. Had he hesitated and wavered this much during his life as well? He understood, at least in theory. He truly did understand that they had to win this battle. But his body wouldn't listen to what he said no matter what.

—Ah, damn it. I really give up.

The image that faintly arose in his mind was that feeble hand seeking help. That person's voice had been thin and fleeting like a mayfly, trembling so frailly.

—Because we are grave sinners who fatten ourselves by eating the weak like that.

The words 'It's too late for that' floated to his mind. Yes, it truly was too late for such sentiments. He was a monster who consumed prana just by manifesting. That was his true form. Who knew how many homunculi might have already died for his sake?

It truly was too late to start thinking like this. But even so, *he wouldn't do it*. He had decided that and resolved himself not to do it.

"…For now, let's look for the others."

He wanted the Holy Grail, and he wanted to exert himself for the sake of his comrades—that much was fine. But the question of whether or not he could do that while *following his heart* had become a problem, obstructing his path.

"Hmm?"

Claaaaaaang—Rider frantically turned around at the high-pitched metallic sound. With bloodstains and dents here and there over its red frame, a conventional American sports-car, a Chevrolet Corvette, plunged towards Rider while dodging golems and sending Dragon Tooth Warriors and homunculi flying.

"No way!?"

Though he was shocked at the appearance of such an overly mismatched intruder on this traditional battlefield, Rider was still a Servant, and so he immediately took evasive maneuvers. Passing right by him, the Corvette's steering wheel was apparently turned with absurd force, as it came to a halt while spinning around as if it were swung by a giant.

As Rider watched the car in mute amazement, a clattering sound came from the driver's seat. The driver seemed to be trying to open the door, but perhaps due to having hit against something, it appeared to be completely bent shut.

"Gah, how irritating!"

Along with those words, the door was blown off.

Slender feet stepped out from the driver's seat. A girl, with her face dirtied black here and there, came out and hit the roof of the car with obvious displeasure. She wore a vivid red leather jacket and tube-top on her upper body, and cut jeans that exposed her thighs on her lower body. The door of the front passenger's seat was also similarly blown off a moment later, and a man slowly crawled out from the car. He was a giant of a man who wore black boots with black trousers, and his overall appearance truly made it seem like he lived a showy and destructive life totally unconnected to that of a proper and respectable person.

"Hey, Master, American cars aren't very sturdy, are they?"

"…The only vehicle that could withstand your driving is a tank. Rather, do you really have B rank in the Riding skill? Do you actually know how to drive? No, it's fine. There's no need to answer. This is just your nature. Yeah."

The man replied with a tired expression… In other words, she was a Servant, then? Rider of Black stiffened. It wasn't that he was surprised by the car. It was because he could tell that the Servant in front of him was incredibly powerful.

"Saber—of Red."

In response to Rider's murmur, Saber of Red flashed a fearless smile.

"Yo. You're a Black Servant… right?"

"Based on the profiles we were given, he's probably Rider. Now then, Saber. I leave the rest to you. I'm outta here."

"What's with that attitude, Master? Won't you stay and watch my valorous figure with your own eyes?"

"I would watch to my heart's content if we weren't in the middle of a battlefield…"

The large man looked over their surroundings while sighing. Not only were there Dragon Tooth Warriors, homunculi and golems everywhere, but he also caught glimpses of clashes emitting absurd amounts of prana between Servants here and there.

"Tch, it can't be helped. Go on, hurry up and run away!"

"Roger that. Then, well, make sure to come back alive."

Saber's Master headed over to the driver's seat, and leaving the door unattached, he forcibly drove off in the Chevrolet Corvette.

"Good grief. Going off to fight without me, there's a limit even to joking around… Well, whatever. The lead actor arriving late on stage and the king joining the battle leisurely are part of how the world works."

"—Huh, you're a king?"

"Correct. If you surrender, I'll finish you with a quick and easy decapitation."

"…No, that's a bit…"

Rider had already regained his footing after dodging the car. As he held his lance and prepared himself to fight, Saber of Red looked at him with a doubtful expression.

"Hey, hey, Rider. What about the steed you're supposed to be riding?"

"Ah, I'm having it rest for a little bit."

Saber of Red's expression suddenly became filled with killing intent. It appeared she couldn't hold herself back at the way Rider's attitude seemed to make light of her.

"Aaah? What can a Rider do without riding a steed? That just makes you an amateur on top of being a weak warrior."

"—Well, I can't deny that, but…"

"No, you should deny it."

"No, no, I'm a really honest guy, you see. Being forced to desperately kill the enemy is the role of a Servant, though."

"Tch… can't be helped then. By the way, Rider. Is it true that Saber of Black has fallen?"

"It's true, it's true, it's seriously true."

"What was the cause?"

"Hmm…… From an outsider's perspective, it would look like internal dissent. From his perspective, he just stuck to his beliefs, I guess?"

"Uwah, that's so archaic. Was Saber of Black some kind of knight from the sticks? He *kicked the bucket* because he stuck to his beliefs? How ridiculous and stupid!"

At those words, the atmosphere over the area completely changed. The one who changed was Rider of Black, and Saber of Red's expression also tightened in response.

"—I won't deny that either, you know? I won't deny it, but don't you dare talk about him like that. A swordswoman that looks like a delinquent at best has no right to talk about him!"

"Hoh, you howl quite well. In that case—"

Saber of Red's appearance changed. The enormous amount of prana hidden inside her was released, and her clothing was exchanged for her armor and helm. In her hand was the wide and broad sword of a knight. It was truly a splendid outfit and equipment worthy of one called Saber.

"—The chatting ends here. I'll turn you into sword rust, you damn steed-less Rider!"

"My, my, how scary~…"

The situation was unfavorable for him, and he was also overwhelming inferior to her in terms of sheer power as a Heroic Spirit. But even so, a fight between them was unavoidable.

—Ah, this is bad. I might just die here.

That was his intuition as a knight rather than as a Heroic Spirit. The image of him dying easily and in obscurity if he fought her arose in his mind.

Even in the face of such a despairing reality, Rider of Black's expression and countenance didn't change at all. He prepared his stance with the lance he had pilfered from the knight Argalia in the past, and readied himself to tackle this all-or-nothing battle.

***

A thick fog suddenly appeared in the midst of the battlefield. The homunculi within it were perplexed by it and stopped moving—and then felt an impact like burning sparks from inside their noses.

As they collapsed and fell to their knees one after another, an innocent and laughing voice like that of a fairy resounded above their heads.

"There's lots, lots and lots and lots, everyone looks so yummy!"

The homunculi concluded that it was an enemy, and tried to ready their weapons. But they had no strength left. Even if they stopped breathing, they had already breathed in the air and their lungs hurts as if they were being pulled up with something like needles.

It was no good; they had to run away. Throwing away their weapons, they took two or three unsteady footsteps—and fell down. They couldn't put any strength into their legs. Their heads throbbed as if gushing with insects, and their thoughts fell into messy confusion.

"He… lp…"

One of them muttered that while wheezing. And in response…

"Ufufu, there are so many I don't know which to choose first. What should I do~♪"

The cry for help was rejected by the innocent words of a young girl.

It hurt so much their eyes melted. The air they breathed scorched their lungs. The feeling of having their hearts corrode away was terrible.

Ah, it hurts, it hurts, it hurts, someone, please, help————————!

"Then, let's dig in!"

Charming yet cruel words that were as sickly-sweet as sugar. In an instant, the internal organs which were essential for living were gouged out from them. The homunculi, who originally should have had a limited capacity to express emotions, screamed in terror.

But those screams were covered by the heavy fog and faded away without reaching anyone.

This fog was truly the stomach of a monster, a space of absolute murder. You died just by being inside it, and even if you tried running away or resisting, you still died. The one who ruled this space was a serial killer—'Jack the Ripper'.

"Thanks for the meal."

Night and fog. Always taking the first move without exception, she continued increasing her victims without ever being questioned by anyone—

The battlefield was already in a state that could only be loved by the god of chaos.

Arrows of light had fallen down like rain as the opening attack, and a chariot pulled by three steeds had run through the skies. Stakes of death gushed forth one after another in swarms while a spearman clad in flames attacked them. A bowman who seemed to have become one with the forest challenged a mounted warrior who had gotten off his chariot, while a beast-like bow-woman ran about the battlefield and turned a mad warrior, who continued smiling even while reduced to a disgusting lump of meat, into a hedgehog full of arrows. Another mad warrior continued rampaging without ever running out of breath as if she were a Perpetual Motion Machine, while a mediator who seemed like a monster maintained his calm as he fought her. Stone giants, homunculi whose expressions never changed as they wrecked destruction, Dragon Tooth Warriors who pushed forward no matter how much they were smashed apart. A swordswoman who looked like lump of steel was opposed by a lovely-looking mounted warrior wielding a lance. An ancient queen had launched a surprise attack with her floating fortress in order to oppose magi who had shut themselves inside a sturdy castle, while a serial killer hid herself within the fog—

The blood of homunculi dyed the grass-covered plains scarlet, and the rubble of golems and Dragon Tooth Warriors fell and piled up everywhere like snow.

The word [peace] no longer existed in this place where everyone fought and tried to kill one another.

The Great Holy Grail War was speeding up more and more, coiling around and submerging those who got close to it like liquefied sludge.

And the ones who appeared on this hellish land of chaos was the supreme referee of the Great Holy Grail War—Ruler, also known as Jeanne d'Arc, and one other person who accompanied her.

Her companion was the homunculus who called himself Sieg.

Chapter 3

—Now that she thought about it, she had felt that something was 'wrong' from the beginning.

A large battle consisting of seven Servants versus seven Servants. It was true that this was a state of emergency that warranted summoning Ruler.

But Ruler couldn't help but feel that this wasn't the true objective assigned to her.

Something inside her chest was urging her on. It was closer to a sense of impending danger than a sense of duty.

Something that couldn't be undone was occurring. The instant she saw that giant floating fortress, Ruler's uneasiness reached its peak.

Most likely, a large-scale battle was about to start between the Black and Red factions. Ruler would be fine with whichever of them won as long as they asked a correct and proper wish of the Holy Grail. At first, she had felt relieved on this point.

That was because the Masters in both factions were magi. Magi may be those who are disconnected from human morals, but at the same time they wouldn't try to grant a purely corrupt wish. They only thing why would wish for is to reach the Root, or perhaps something else related to magecraft—but regardless, almost everything they might possibly wish for was right and proper.

However, she felt doubts start to form inside her when the Red faction attacked her. The way the Black faction tried to bring her over to their side was fine. That was, in the end, only an act for the sake of achieving victory in the Great Holy Grail War.

The problem was the Red faction. Ruler could not think of any reason for why they would attempt to kill her. The demerits of it exceeded the merits. And now the Red faction was attacking the Fortress of Millennia, the stronghold of the Black faction, with a floating fortress.

Ruler had crossed the mountain along with Sieg and took a roundabout path around the fortress' outer circumference. When they came out from the forest where Rider and Archer of Red had trespassed and fought a fierce battle, they arrived in the middle of the battle. Homunculi and golems were clashing against Dragon Tooth Warriors, and were performing the gruesome act of killing each other. Spells exploded like cannon fire here and there, while battle between what seemed to be Servants were quickly changing the surrounding area into empty plots of land.

While gazing upon this gruesome battlefield, Ruler focused on the floating fortress that likely belonged to the Red faction… That thing was far too abnormal even among the many Holy Grail Wars that had occurred in history. The ability to fly itself was a simple piece of magecraft that even ordinary magi could use, let alone Servants.

But that thing—was on an entirely different level. There weren't many who were capable of accomplishing feats on such a scale even among magi from the Age of Gods.

"Listen well, Sieg-kun. From here on, I have to cross this battlefield and meet with 'someone' from the other faction."

"…Why?"

"There's 'someone' I need to meet on this battlefield. I don't know who it is, or even whether it's a Servant, Master, or someone else entirely. But I must meet with them."

Though the homunculus tilted his head in puzzlement, there was a mysteriously strong persuasiveness in Ruler's words. It wasn't because her tone was filled with confidence; rather, she was whispering to him quite anxiously. And yet, he still caught a glimpse of a strong will in her that wouldn't be stopped no matter what.

"I see," the homunculus said in understanding. The reason she had been idolized and followed by soldiers in the past wasn't because she displayed a strong will with strong words. Her words weren't for the sake of coercing others.

Her words were simply for the sake communicating her will, saying [I'm going].

"I think that's dangerous, but if that your will, it can't be helped."

Saying that, he placed a hand on the hilt of his sword without hesitation. It was, in other words, a declaration of his intention to go with her as well. Even if they had only known each other for a short time, he had been quickly able to come to understand Ruler. The homunculus who had given himself the name Sieg had the kind of personality where, after deciding something even once, he would *follow through* with it till the very end.

If she told him to not come and went off by herself… he would probably just follow after her even so. That would be dangerous. He would definitely be viewed as an enemy by the Red faction. And there was no way to know whether or not the magi of the Black faction might react if they saw him as well.

But Sieg had a different objective from her on this battlefield.

"What do you intend to do?"

"Leaving aside my comrades who are fighting on the front lines, I might have a chance at having a short talk with the others who are on stand-by in the rear. Depending on the situation, I intend to talk with them and ask for the release of the other homunculi within the castle. After that—"

"After that?"

Sieg cast his eyes down apologetically and murmured.

"…No, I'd like to meet with Rider, but there's no telling whether or not we'd be able to meet. Meeting him in this situation would also cause him too much trouble."

"I don't think she would be troubled by it, though…"

Either way, Ruler judged that having him go with him was the most appropriate course of action.

"In any case, please come with me then. But… listen, at least avoid fighting any Servants, okay? If you run into trouble with any magi of the Black faction, use my name. If you do that, you might be able to avoid being immediately executed by them."

"Thank you."

—At that instant, she could somehow intuitively tell that her decision was truly correct under *God's will*. That was how deeply she felt doubts carved within her heart. Just what could a mere homunculus like him do on a battlefield ruled by Servants? …He could never become a swordsman like Saber just by having a sword. But she didn't have the time and liberty to wrack her brain over his fate.

Because right now, she had to plunge into this chaotic battlefield and search for something fatally dangerous.

"All right!"

Lightly slapping her cheeks with her hands, Ruler summoned a flag into her hand and grasped it tightly. It was a battle flag, the holy flag that had always been by her side in life. "Don't fall behind," she whispered to Sieg over her shoulder.

"—Then, let's go!"

Ruler charged onto the battlefield. Sieg also ran after her from right behind her.

An absurd number of Dragon Tooth soldiers immediately rushed at them. Going as far as to even ignore the homunculi and golems they were fighting, the Dragon Tooth Warriors all focused in Ruler.

"Just like I thought…!"

Ruler swung the flag with her hand and smashed the Dragon Tooth Warriors with it one by one. Ruler's basic motto was to avoid doing anything that directly affected the course of the Holy Grail War, but she couldn't just stand by and do nothing if they openly treated her as an enemy.

Along with a sharp yell that seemed to cut through the battlefield, Ruler dashed towards the location of her objective.

***

Suddenly, Shirou stopped moving. He clicked his tongue and jumped backwards with a bitter expression.

"Caster, we're withdrawing. That girl has 'noticed' it faster than I thought. This must… be due to some kind of Revelation skill on her part."

Berserker of Black was bewildered by Shirou's sudden widening of the distance between them, and she decided to just wait and see what he did for the time being.

'I did hear that those chosen for the Ruler class are mostly saints due to their impartial judgement. So she's one of those types, huh?'

Caster of Red shrugged in a sarcastic manner.

"So it seems… This is a critical situation, Caster. If she denounces me, the situation will turn extremely chaotic. No, to put it in your words, it would become *uninteresting*."

'Trying to forcibly stretch out parts that aren't very exciting is the sign of a poor writing. That being the case, let's end the story of my Master of the battlefield for the time being.'

"Yes, let's withdraw. —Well, to look at it another way: it's good enough that we managed to weather through this. Very soon, everything will change into a situation that even Ruler won't be able to do anything about. And it seems I really am in the right, since I managed to avoid 'death' by a paper-thin distance."

Saying that, Shirou stabbed Black Keys into the ground, forming a wall in front of Berserker of Black as she tried to step forward. He and Caster then began withdrawing from the battlefield at full speed.

'Master. That damn Ruler is pushing her way straight towards you without faltering. Hurry! The Dragon Tooth Warriors can't hold her back!'

"I know!"

Slightly impatient, Shirou quickly shelved away the warning and increased his speed further… Within the dark forest where there was no light—with not even the moonlight shining well through the trees—Shirou ran at full speed without paying any mind at all to the near-absolute darkness. His speed was, to put it in a single phrase, beyond abnormal. Easily exceeding sixty kilometers per meter, Shirou simply ran and ran.

…However, there was someone chasing after him in hot pursuit. Seeing her over his shoulder, Shirou widened his eyes slightly.

"Berserker of Black… To think you would chase after me."

The instant she saw the wall of Black Keys, Berserker decided to pursue the Master known as Shirou. It was due to something that could be called intuition, which should have had no connection with an artificial human like her.

Caules had told her to search for other Servants elsewhere if the Master and Servant she faced ran away, but she had refused it with one of her usual moans.

In any case—though she herself didn't really understand what it was that bugged her.

She felt that it was *bad* to let this man escape here. That Master was definitely abnormal. No, in the first place, was he really a Master?

If she were to say what he was based on the feeling running down her skin, it would be—

"——uu!?"

As if stitching her brief moment of thought, four blades were shot right at her. The man had apparently thrown Black Keys as he ran away without even looking back at her.

Berserker of Black instantly grasped the best option here. That is, she ignored them.

She didn't feel pain; what she received was only damage as a numerical value. That wasn't a big deal either. In the end, the blades compiled out of prana possessed meager physical destructive power, and weren't sufficient to defeat a Servant.

Still, receiving a direct hit from them might slow her down and eat up a little time. If it were anyone besides her, that is.

"aaaaaaAAAAAAAAAiiiiaaaaaaaa!!"

With a scream that could make a human's heart shudder, she released even more speed. She didn't pay any attention to the direct hits from the Black Keys. Eventually, the prana of the blades dispersed and the hilts slipped off her body, while her wounds immediately closed up.

"—Unbelievable."

Looking over his shoulder, Shirou didn't know whether to be impressed or stunned. If she had knocked down the Black Keys, then it would have been understandable. If she had held her ground, it would be have convenient for him. But to think that she hadn't slowed down at all even after several direct hits…!

'I believe the name of her creator was Doctor Frankenstein, correct? Just with what kind of design did he make such a monster?'

Shirou smiled bitterly at Caster of Red's words—and then suddenly thought of a crafty plan.

"Caster, please materialize yourself. I have need of your 'theatrical troupe'."

Caster instantly materialized along with a single book in his hand.

"Oh, I see, I see! Then let's have her meet the man she both dearly loves and hates! [Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player. That struts and frets his hour upon the stage!]"

Caster cried out those words loudly, and then an impossible miracle appeared within the dark forest. Once he confirmed its appearance, Caster went back into spiritual form in order to fall behind Shirou as he ran.

And then Berserker of Black, who was chasing after Shirou, met it there.

"…uu….!?"

Confusion, that was all she felt. A man who shouldn't be here spoke to her with a gentle expression that was truly unlike him. In life, he had never once shown such a smile to her.

"—Stop."

"…aa, aaa…"

Berserker, who had not halted even after receiving direct hits from the Black Key—and had even accelerated—came to a stop. She wasn't good at showing her emotions, but her eyes had widened due to shock and wonder.

The person in front of her was *Doctor Frankenstein*. The one who created, her father, the one who she should hate, her—

Why? How?

Berserker of Black wasn't shocked by the fact that he was here. What shocked her was simply his gentle smile. Ever since she first opened her eyes, her father's expression was twisted with hate and disgust. From his mouth which she thought would give her words of blessing, only words of insult and abuse had come out.

It was an event that occurred on a lonely November night—

"It's a failure, a failure, a failure, a failure, a failure!"

"What the hell, this is just a worthless *doll puppet!"*

"It has no emotion! Did the lines not connect!? Even the tear glands are no good! Forget the fact that it isn't the perfect maiden Eve, it isn't even human!"

—Ah, it seems I was a failed creation.

What saddened her wasn't the fact that she had been judged a failed creation. It was that her father, as he fell into a furious frenzy and tore at his own hair, was far too pitiful.

"I'm sorry, Father. I'm sorry, I'm sorry for being a failed creation. I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I'll correct myself. I'll properly correct myself. So please don't be angry. Don't be angry, don't be angry, don't be angry—"

Though she tried to cry, for some reason, she couldn't. It appeared that her function to shed tears also didn't work. Every time she tried to comfort him as he drowned himself in alcohol, he would push her away, hit her, and kick her.

It didn't hurt. Just that, every time she was hit… her heart tightened terribly, for reasons she didn't understand.

The girl felt sorrow for her father, who continued doing nothing but lament in regret day after day. She wracked her brain to figure out what she should do. What could she do to comfort her father? Resolving herself, she decided to go out and leave their residence.

—She found various things outside.

The green trees, the transparent ponds of water, the shining sun. If she brought these back with her, her father might also become happy. As she thought that, she was suddenly attacked by a stray dog. It had probably reacted to the rotten smell that wafted from her clothes.

When the dog bit her arm, she tore off its neck. In that instant, she received a revelation.

"Ah, pretty. Pretty. This is pretty. Since I don't have this inside me, it's surely pretty—"

She split open its abdomen and found even more fresh entrails. These were things that she didn't have. So she thought they were pretty. So she decided to bring it back and show it to her father.

Pink entrails were pretty, and fresh red blood was beautiful. She never once thought they were ugly or dirty. She didn't think the stench of blood was unpleasant either.

…The instant she showed it all to him, her relationship with her father was decisively snapped apart. Because, not only was she a failed creation, she was also clearly a hideous monster.

A life-form that feels blood is beautiful and is intoxicated by entrails—is what people call a monster.

"No, that's not it, that's not it. Really, that's not it. I'm normal. I just wanted to make you happy, Father."

Her father ran away from her in fear, never showing her a smile right till the very end. Instead, he left her an absolute curse at the end.

"You are a monster! A mad *monster!"*

…So, she thought to become normal. She decided to obtain reason and understand common sense. And she decided to have a mate. Because normal humans had families. Now that she had been denied by her father, she needed a mate no matter what.

But that was not something that could be obtained by wishing for it. Nor was it something that could be obtained by stealing it away. Even so, she kidnapped many men. But none of them could be her mate.

So she decided to ask her father for one.

"Please make someone who will love me, please make someone who will look at me. If I'm supposed to be the perfect maiden Eve, you should have a responsibility to make the original human Adam as well—"

Her father refused, and the girl was driven mad by anger and sorrow. Her anger was due to her father's betrayal. Her sorrow—was because she understood that she would be alone until the day she died.

She just wanted someone to love her. She just wanted to love someone. She just wanted to know love… No, if even that wish couldn't be granted, she thought to herself that she at least wanted to be hated. She chased after her father, accused him, was irritated by how he ran from her, and killed his family as a result. Even so, her father ran, ran, just ran away from her.

Right until his last moments, he just continued to run away from her. He didn't even think of revenge against the one who had broken his heart and killed the people he loved.

"Why won't you hate me? Why won't you look at me?"

…The girl threw herself into hellfire along with her father. And thus ended the story of Frankenstein. All that was left behind was the legend of a freakish, hideous monster.

And now, the father who had betrayed her was right before her eyes. He was looking at her with a warm expression. It was a moment she had never seen even in her wildest dreams.

"—Yes, that's good. Stop fighting. I didn't create you for the sake of something like that."

"uu, aa…"

The doctor held out his hand to her head—it appeared he was trying to do what a parent often did to their child. In other words, he was going to pat her head. That was what she had so eagerly wished for.

She had wanted to be loved. She had wanted someone to love her. She had wanted to love someone.

That wished was about to be fulfilled.

But.

But that was precisely why…

"uuuuaaaaaaaaaaaaauaaaaaAAAAaaaaaaaAAAAAA———!!"

Berserker fell into a furious frenzy. No, it wasn't something as simple as a frenzy. With unconcealed killing intent as well, she struck the flank of the man who allegedly looked like Doctor Frankenstein with **Maiden's Chastity**.

"What, are you…!?"

*Don't speak, don't speak, don't speak,

That's right; it was just as her Master said. There were still plenty of places where she ought to be fighting. She had openly laid bare her emotions. Ah, how embarrassing. Her Master's evaluation of her had probably lowered—

'...Don't worry about it. You fought well. What happened just now couldn't be helped. That Master is simply abnormal. In any case, our maximum-priority objective right now is to kill the Red Servants. Don't forget that.'

It seemed her Master hadn't lowered his opinion of her at all.

Nodding in understanding, Berserker of Black ran out of the forest. But even after now regaining her calm, somewhere in her thought circuits, she felt regret for letting that Master slip away.

Caules felt the same way. He had merely seen him from a distance through his familiars, but even so, he clearly felt that Master's oddness… his abnormality.

But he was still just a Master. Shaking off the chill he felt, Caules devoted his attention to directing Berserker.

Did he regret having used a Command Spell? …No. Caules felt confidence in his decision. Berserker's turmoil had been staggering. It was only natural, after having killed her father, whom she both fervently adored and hated. It was possible that it would have lasting effects on her later on. He didn't think his decision to use a Command Spell to wash it all away at once was wrong.

…At the very least, he'd think it was more worthwhile than using one to force her to activate her Noble Phantasm or to stop her from doing so herself.

***

Explosions, shrieks, screams, spell chanting—all these noises mixed together and became one upon the battlefield, jumping into Ruler's ears. Those who wished for it, those who didn't, and even those who didn't even know the word 'wish' took no notice of it, while Ruler ran even faster across the battlefield.

"…!"

Within the huge floating fortress—there was one Servant. The reason she could tell that even from down here was due to the beams of light being shot down from the fortress along with overwhelming killing intent. The Servant there concentrated all that destructive power sufficient to destroy a castle onto Ruler alone.

But Ruler hoisted her flag without panicking. Her Magic Resistance was EX rank. As such, she who was a saint couldn't be wounded even by magecraft from the Age of Gods. However, this resistance only turned spells away from her. In other words, it didn't receive and negate it.

"Sieg-kun, get away!"

Sieg immediately reacted to those words. After getting away from that spot with a roll across the ground, he saw Ruler disappear in an instant under a beam of light that fell from the sky.

"Ruler!"

He reflexively shouted—but his voice stopped midway. He was speechless. Being magus right from birth, he understood. The pillar of light that had fallen from the sky just now was a lightning strike filled with malice. With power equal to that of a dropped bomb, even the Saber class which tended to have the highest Magic Resistance wouldn't be able to just shrug it off.

But she—*avoided* it. Though 'avoided' was not the right way to describe it. That spell attack, which totally suppressed, not a single spot, but an entire area, had been diverted away without injuring her.

The lightning strike, which should have had a will of its own, had lost its malice. Instead, the lightning attacked the surrounding area.

If she hadn't called out to him just now, Sieg also would have probably been caught up in the attack. Surrounding her had been the wreckage of golems, along with Dragon Tooth Warriors that had been trying to attack her, but now… every last one of them had completely vanished.

Not a single piece of rubbish remained… If she hadn't called out to him, he might have been reduced to that as well.

"This is… the Servant of the eighth class."

While murmuring that, he looked to the sky. Though Ruler's abnormal Magic Resistance was surprising, what was even more shocking was the feat of magecraft just now. Such a spell that was equal to a bomber attack could only be magecraft from the Age of Gods.

It was probably Caster of Red. That floating fortress was likely the Noble Phantasm or something of a Red Servant. At the very least, such a feat was impossible for a modern magus.

Either way, it still hadn't managed to kill Ruler. Both Sieg and Ruler though that the Servant casting the spells from the floating fortress would therefore give up.

But—

"!?"

They were both shocked at the same time. Without caring at all about the fact that their attacks had been diverted, the Servant above continued firing more spell blasts one after another. They were doing a meaningless act… No, there was meaning to it. This was simply an attempt to buy time. And the means that accompanied it were just too overwhelming.

"Kuh…!"

Ruler looked at Sieg. Yes, Ruler could still move, but Sieg would always have to get away from her. Sieg spoke without wavering.

"…Go on ahead. Either way, I have to meet the people I must meet."

"I understand."

She didn't wish him luck in battle. The battlefield was not something that could be survived just by having luck. If she had to say anything, it should be a prayer that he would not encounter a Servant.

But that was impossible. Because he said he would meet with the people he must meet. The first ones he had to meet were the homunculi. Saving them was one of Sieg's objectives.

And there was one more person he had to meet. A Servant—Rider of Black, Astolfo. His wish to meet with this Servant wasn't out of a clear sense of purpose. Perhaps he would just meet him because he wanted to meet him. Ruler thought that was a little charming.

However, going to meet Rider meant encountering other Servants. He held a sword in his hand, and his body was clearly filled with fighting spirit.

Therefore, he would probably be viewed as an enemy by the Red faction. By all rights, she should stop him, but he would probably never stop. Even though he knew that meeting Rider was a futile and meaningless act and that he would be betraying Rider's prayer for him, Sieg would still go meet him.

Ruler began running. She sensed that the 'someone' she was after was getting further away, so she increased her speed more and more. She abandoned even dealing with the slashes from the Dragon Tooth Warriors and simply ran.

It wasn't that she wanted to stop this war. As long as the war between the two factions was tuned correctly, Ruler had no objections to it at all.

But a strong sense of uneasiness that made her teeth clench and grate urged her to cut across this battlefield. She had to meet them, she had to meet the 'someone' who was getting further away.

And a Red Servant was intentionally obstructing her. They piled up Dragon Tooth Warriors like a mountain and simply created a wall to block her.

"—You're in my way!"

Of course, even the delay of having to deal with a minor obstruction like this was precious time to Ruler. She aimed the tip of her flag at a single point and broke through the wall without pausing.

And then, she waved the holy water carried and displayed the location of each Servant just as she did before. She knew that the Black Servants were not a problem right now, and so focused her attention on only the locations of the Red Servants.

Mere Dragon Tooth Warriors were far from effective at stalling for time against her. But Servants were another matter. First, she definitely had to avoid being chased after by any of them.

Ruler swiftly came up with a route that did not come into contact with any Red Servants, and ran to follow that path. She felt a chill swell up inside her increasingly as time passed.

And then, the worst possible match-up barged onto her route as if to block her.

***

This is fine. Sieg breathed a sigh of relief as he watched Ruler leave. She had her own objective, and it wasn't something he should hinder. Her objective was more noble and important. Unlike his.

There was a mountain of things he should be doing instead of thinking as he ran. Dragon Tooth Warriors were coming at him, and though a Servant would be able to beat one with a single blow, they were enemies that he himself had to handle very cautiously one by one.

Thrusting at them with his sword had little effect, so he charged forward to collide with one and glue himself against it, and then vigorously bisected it from the waist. The Dragon Tooth Warrior crumbled in the blink of an eye. He cut off the arm of another Dragon Tooth Warrior that stepped forward from his flank and softly touched it with one hand.

Straße gehen
"**Logic path\open**."

He activated his Magic Circuits—investigated, analyzed and sympathized with the material properties of what he touched—and worked out the necessary logic to reverse it all and destroy it.

Instantly, his palm released a spell that changed the bones of the Dragon Tooth Warrior into the optimal breakable material. Sieg's magecraft required that he analyze his target by touching it, so it had basically zero ranged capability. However, its destructive power was immense.

The Dragon Tooth Warrior was turned into a pile of miniscule pieces.

"Rider!"

His shout was completely swept away in the clatter of the battlefield. While running, he carefully examined the situation of the battlefield. The places where there were noticeably violent clashes of prana were probably where battles between Servants were occurring.

"What are you doing?"

When Sieg turned around at that voice, he found two battle-type homunculi looking at him with gazes containing reproach. 'What are you doing, you must fight too'—that was probably what they meant.

"Enough, enough, stop fighting you guys."

At Sieg's words, the two homunculi exchanged confused glances.

"…If you want to die, I won't stop you. But, if you want to live, go back. Go back and save our fellow homunculi. Both the ones who are being exploited for their prana and the ones who aren't. You guys aren't bound to anything."

"But—that's going against our orders."

"That's right—the order we were given was to fight and defeat the enemy Servants and their followers."

"That order is impossible. You guys should also understand that well. In the first place, what obligation do you have to obey it?"

At Sieg's words, the two homunculi once more exchanged glances. As if to cut into their conversation, a Dragon Tooth Warrior ran at them and swung its sword at Sieg.

Sieg swiftly unsheathed Rider of Black's sword and slashed at it from its flank to its neck. The other two homunculi joined with him and crushed the skull and feet of the Dragon Tooth Warrior with their halberds.

Sieg spoke once more.

"Do you want to die or live? …We have to choose one of them."

That was his last warning. One of the homunculi followed his request and returned to the castle. The other one decided to obey his orders even so, and returned once more to the battlefield.

This is fine, Sieg thought. If given a choice, homunculi couldn't help but choose. Their thought processes weren't so dim that they couldn't understand it, after all.

As servants from birth, the option to rebel strangely never came to their minds. But it was a different matter if they were given the choice.

He had merely given the homunculi in the surrounding rear lines the choice. They would each choose their own path. Sieg wasn't responsible for what they did after that—or rather, he thought that he shouldn't be responsible for them afterwards.

Now he just had to search for Rider of Black. He was so clumsy that he hadn't thought of what he would do after finding him. Rider of Black would probably lament that of all things, this was the first thing Sieg chose to do with his new freedom.

—Even so. Even so, there were feelings that drove him that maddeningly drove him. There were things he wanted to do and couldn't forget, and he didn't have the resolution to seek things like peaceful, ordinary days.

There were things much, much more precious to him than such a pipe dream. He wanted to save his comrades. He wanted to meet Rider of Black again and repay him.

He didn't care if it was useless. Even though he knew full well that Rider hadn't wished for him to do such a thing and might lament Sieg's decision. He simply—chose this.

Yes, since that was what he had chosen to do, he couldn't turn back. That was the worst thing he could do.

He took a deep breath. He was terrified; even though he hadn't been frightened at all when he fell right to the brink of death back then. When he thought he might be letting go of what he had temporarily obtained—he couldn't help but feel terrified.

…But his heartbeat was stirring up something inside him.

Gritting his teeth, he tightly clenched his shudderingly cold hands several times. *I can do this,* he thought, hoped, and prayed—and took his first step forward.

***

The battle between the two Lancers was still going on neck-and-neck.

While they were both Lancers, their fighting styles were completely different. Lancer of Black stabbed stakes at his enemy just by directing them with a single finger, while Lancer of Red aimed to directly smash his enemy with the spear he held in his hands.

Lancer of Black would throw stakes while maintaining his distance, and Lancer of Red would close the distance between them while breaking every one of those stakes. The battle was an repetition of this sequence.

Mysteries are negated by stronger mysteries. In that regard, Lancer of Red greatly exceeded Lancer of Black. Based on his strength in life, the great hero Karna was truly exceptional.

In order to send him to his grave, the thunder god Indra had no other choice but to devise an intricate scheme. Karna was the best and proudest spearman who hadn't fallen to the ground even after being betrayed by all his allies.

—However, even against such a hero, Lancer of Black didn't fall before his attacks.

Unlike Lancer of Red, whose existence in actual history was unclear, Lancer of Black—Vlad III was a hero had actually existed in this world.

He was a patriotic hero who had been feared by all surrounding countries, and even though he was equally feared by his own citizens—he still received great respect and worship from them.

Without him, their country wouldn't have existed. The hero who had carved this into the world's history had been brought back to life in that very same country. His fame and popularity was equal to that of a great in this country.

Kaziklu Bey
His Noble Phantasm, **Lord of Execution**, possessed uncommon power as a result as well.

True, they were only ordinary stakes. But—the problem was that these stakes could be freely summoned forth according to Lancer of Black's command.

Though, even when faced with an enemy with a Noble Phantasm of that level, Lancer of Red was still easily a match for a thousand of them. Without paying any care to the stakes that stabbed countless times all over his body from his feet to his right shoulder to his left flank to his elbow, neither his movements nor his strength changed at all. Right now, his Noble Phantasm
Kavach a and Kunda la
O Surya、Become Armor was negating 90% of the damage from the stakes. They were reduced to mere scratches that he could heal while fighting.

However…

"—Magnificent. You've broken one thousand stakes with that spear, burned eight hundred with those flames covering your body and stopped two thousand with that golden armor. Lancer of Red, you are without a doubt worthy of being a hero. With that armor, even a battering ram would have no effect, let alone my stakes."

Karna accepted Lancer of Black's praise with a solemn attitude.

"Thank you for your words, lord of this land."

"If you weren't a pagan, I would allow you to surrender. That alone is regrettable, that you believe in a fake god."

"Hmm, how do you know that my god is a fake?"

"Of course I know. *God is a pure and untouched absolute.* If not, who would believe in him? Who would rely on him? A god who mingles with people and has intercourse with them is merely a hideous monster."

"Now, I wonder about that. It's only natural that any religious faith undergoes innumerable changes depending on the land. If it is a land where floods occur, then one who rules over water is the God there. If my gods and their gods are monsters, then the God you believe is also merely a monster upon whom the ideal of being [absolute] was pressed upon."

Instantly, fire seethed in Lancer of Black's eyes. Even after seeing that, Lancer of Red spoke clearly and calmly.

"—I see. You're quite stern and severe, lord of impalement, Kaziklu Bey. To you, these stakes are both attack and defence, both a demonstration of force and an embodiment of fear."

"…What?"

"You use these stakes to establish your domain, your castle and what you must protect; in other words, you try to form a country with just a single person. Is it an act out of love for your homeland, or is it due to your sense of responsibility as the king of a state?"

Lancer of Red exposed Lancer of Black in an indifferent manner. Not his body, but what was within his heart.

"But there aren't any subjects to obey you here, are there? A king might be aloof and isolated. But there is no such thing as a king without a retinue… What a blunder, lord of impalement. I am a Heroic Spirit, and do not fear even making an entire country my enemy."

"—Hoh, how interesting."

Lancer of Black smiled. It was an extremely violent smile charged full of anger and fury, hatred and killing intent.

"So you don't fear facing my country by yourself. As expected of a hero—I have already punished you three times over for that arrogance. Yes… My stakes have pierced you three times in total. Therefore, you will die here."

"—!?"

Feeling dread suddenly hit his body, Lancer of Red immediately attempted to jump back—but it was no longer an issue of being slow or fast. It was already in the past. *The attack was already ending…!*

Kaziklu Bey

"You guessed quickly. Yes, my **Lord of Execution** isn't a Noble Phantasm that creates stakes. It's the 'stakes stabbed into the enemy' themselves that are the Noble Phantasm. As long as you're within this territory of mine, no matter how much you fortify your body, if it is a fact that you have received an attack from me—"

Within Lancer of Red's body, something was swelling up with violent force. Hard, sharp, repulsively cold, it was—

"Stakes, huh…"

The golden armor that clad Karna's body could protect against stakes, blades, hammers, or any really kind of attack regardless of whether it was physical or magical. However—attacks from within his body were a single exception. Furthermore, these stakes were *manifesting in the state of already having pierced him.*

Even a hornet with strong jaws and stingers that freely danced through the sky and coveted prey was just powerless food when inside a nest weaved by a multitude of spiders.

Blood trickled down from the three stakes stabbing into him very quickly. This was probably Karna's first experience of receiving damage while clad in that armor.

In a flash, Lancer of Black charged forward in order to snatch victory. From the beginning, he never thought even in his dreams that Lancer of Red would be killed by something of this level.

So he couldn't overlook this single instant. No matter how great a hero was, there was no way they could resist while stabbed with stakes—!

"This is checkmate, Lancer of Red…!"

Lancer of Black launched an attack with a stream of countless stakes and also the spear he held in his hand. The attack was already closer to a swarm of piranhas than a Noble Phantasm. After all, there was no pause in his prana usage. As long the homunculi squeezed out prana for him, he could continue creating stakes perpetually. Two thousand stakes was simple the maximum limit he could invoke at once. No matter how many stakes were destroyed, he could be recreated as long as he had prana.

In other words, this battlefield was basically covered entirely by stakes containing his malice. He couldn't be beaten. There shouldn't be any way for a single warrior to challenge and beat this king who ruled the land and subdued his nation.

But—his entire surroundings being his enemy was the most commonplace of commonplace situations for the Heroic Spirit Karna.

As Lancer of Black thrusted his spear at the crown of his head, Lancer of Red splendidly diverted it away with a sweep of his own spear as if he couldn't even feel the damage from the stakes stabbing into him.

"…!!"

Even Lancer of Black was left speechless. Meanwhile, Lancer of Red displayed his superhuman will power even further.

"O Agni flame."

A blaze wrapped around Lancer of Red's entire body. Lancer of Black instantly understood that he was trying to burn away the stakes.

He was going to laugh in ridicule at him, but stiffened an instant later. The flames went inside Lancer of Red's body. They burned, burned and burned—until every single one of the stakes piercing Lancer of Red were blasted away.

Without wasting any time, Lancer of Black attacked with another rain of stakes.

But what the stakes were trying to destroy was, of all things, an incarnation of fire. He was the son of the sun, who could not be burned even by flame spirits.

His sturdy spear handed to him by the gods, the golden armor that had been granted to him due to his mother's supplication, and his blood ties to the sun god—their stats were all listed as half their actual value when checking the stats of the Servant known as Karna.

Karna's strongest weapon was his 'will'. Possessing a strong will and a strong heart, he was the hero of charity who had never resented a single person despite experiencing all kinds of misfortune. He was a man who had given things special to anyone else, but never once was treated [special] himself.

Neither proud nor arrogant, he was a hero who merely carried out a way of life that would not shame the name of his father from the moment he was born to when he was finally shot down.

Therefore, even with his entrails gouged out and the nerves of his arms severed by just three stakes. Even when he was attacked by an overwhelming feeling of oppression due to an endless stream of stakes. Even when he had to endure imaginable agony as he circulated fire through the inside of his body in order to deal with.

Lancer of Red would never fear nor bend his knees in submission—!

Flames surrounded the two Servants. It was exactly the same as earlier. The flames were returning everything to nothing. But that wasn't all.

"—Lord of this land, I shall be taking your head!"

While clad in flames, Lancer of Red fiercely plunged forward—and without minding the damage from the stakes and flames at all, he landed a direct hit to the tip of Lancer of Black's shoulder.

"Guh…!"

A cry of unconcealed anguish. The struggle for supremacy ended here. Lancer of Red had finally seized Lancer of Black. And in order to increase the success of his finishing blow, Lancer of Red began to wait for the chance to release his other Noble Phantasm that rivaled his golden armor:

Brahmastra Kundala
O Brahma、Curse Me.

***

The Fortress of Millennia. The Masters there viewed the battlefield through their familiars and Menorah, and either gave directions to their Servants or had nothing more to say and simply watched the battle while holding their breaths.

Among them, Darnic suddenly spoke up.

"—I'm going out. Fiore, I leave commanding the Masters to you. Henceforth, you are all to obey her orders."

"…Grandfather?"

Darnic didn't respond to Fiore and leapt out from a window. Flight wasn't a very difficult spell for a magus. He stepped through the sky as if walking up a set of stairs.

—Like I thought, I suppose I'll have to activate it.

While looking down at his Command Spells, he carefully examined the current situation of his Servant… Lancer of Black. He considered Lancer of Red, who had fought evenly against Saber of Black, the hero Siegfried, and also Rider of Red, Achilles, whom Archer of Black had concluded couldn't be killed except by Heroic Spirits with the blood of the gods.

In addition to those two, Saber of Red was also a formidable enemy. Even now, she was one-sidedly fighting against their faction's Rider. At this rate, Rider of Black would be defeated.

But Darnic still had a last resort. Lancer of Black's other Noble Phantasm.

It was a truly certain-kill Noble Phantasm that, once activated, would allow him to easily tear apart Lancer of Red and kill even a Heroic Spirit with divine blood.

Of course, the price for using it was high. Rather, it was something that he absolutely did not want to use.

Legend of Dracula
"**Succession of Blood**..."

Once used, Lancer of Black would transform into a blood-sucking vampire that was only told of in folklore. Instead of a Heroic Spirit, he would be reduced to a literal monster.

The price of activating that Noble Phantasm was Darnic's 'life'. Because Lancer of Black had formed a contract as a Servant with Darnic in order to erase Vlad III's blood-tarnished legend—that is, the vampire Dracula from history.

"—In other words. Making me use that Noble Phantasm is the same as spitting upon me. Even if I am about to die, I will absolutely not use it. And if you force me to do so with a Command Spell, I don't need to tell you what will happen to you after that, do I?"

That was the warning, no, the order Lancer of Black had given immediately after being summoned. In other words, if Darnic made him use this Noble Phantasm, he would pay for it with death.

"…But if we lose, I'll die either way."

That was the truth. If he ran away, he could probably extend at least his life, but the magus Darnic Prestone Yggdmillennia would die. That alone was an option he would not choose.

If it was for the sake of grasping victory, Darnic would permit any and all sacrifices. But the problem here was that the Master of Lancer of Black was himself.

He could force Lancer to use **Legend of Dracula** with one Command Spell, and then make Lancer kill himself with a second one. This would remove all problems. But if he did that, Darnic would lose his Servant.

Even if Lancer annihilated all the Red Servants during that time, what followed was a battle between the Masters of the Yggdmillennia clan. Even if Darnic was the clan head, this was a war surrounding the Holy Grail which could grant all wishes.

Even the most sensible clan members like Fiore and Caules wouldn't listen to his orders then.

Then, should he take over another Servant from someone else?

That was also a difficult problem. Would anyone really comply with an order to hand over their Servant? Also, there was no Heroic Spirit besides the already-vanished Saber among them who could oppose Fiore's Servant Chiron.

No matter what he did, it was a situation filled with great risk.

"—Good grief."

He was being cornered. Darnic understood that very well. But he had experienced that many times in the past one hundred years.

Among those experiences, the Third Holy Grail War sixty years ago had been an uncannily harsh battle, so much that, even now, he rejoiced at still being alive like this.

Back then, he had the unexpected fortune of finding a path that lead to the Greater Grail from a hole he had happened to fall into. He then enticed the German Nazis with skillful words, getting them to send in, under the direct orders of the Führer, a huge military force that one wouldn't expect to be sent to an allied country like Japan, and had them steal the Greater Grail.

And then, he intentionally arranged for the transport carrying the Greater Grail to pass through Trifas on the way to Germany, and then killed all the magi and soldiers whom he had fought alongside. Following that were days of research and politics. Outwardly towards the Association, he feigned to have the Yggdmillennia clan content itself with the duty of being a receptacle for drop-out magi.

He altered the Greater Grail little by little to adapt it to Trifas. Making it possible to summon not only pure Heroics Spirits, but also 'those who only have the aspect of a Heroic Spirit', which could be called an unexpected by-product of that process.

At any rate, time was the one thing he had plenty of. Ten years, twenty years, thirty years, forty years, fifty years, sixty years—

What was the origin of this tenacity of his?

The driving force of all magi, to reach the Root? Of course, that played a big part in his reasons. As long as one lived as a magus, to aim for that was natural. But had he really struggled on until this point for such a 'pure' wish?

…A bitter memory from over eighty years ago surfaced in his mind.

At the time, he had been decorated with a brilliant debut as an up-and-coming young magus, and had suddenly obtained a marriage proposal. It was a good match for marriage. Darnic would be tying himself to a clan of long lineage that stood amongst the aristocratic Lords of the Clock Tower.

But then it all came to a halt there. The Yggdmillennia blood was polluted and impure, and couldn't maintain itself past the fifth generation. "All that's left is ruin for your clan," a certain magus had warned him.

—Ridiculous. As long as the clan continues past the fifth generation, any number of counter-measures can be thought of.

But it seemed the only one who thought that way was Darnic. The clan he was about to marry into didn't like risks, and so to them, he immediately became an outsider that had to be excluded.

Even his future brother-in-law, who had slapped his back with a smile and sworn friendship with him, and the woman who was to be his spouse, who had shyly whispered her love to him, had both turned away from him.

—That's fine. Such things happen.

But at that very instant, Yggdmillennia was cut off from their dream of rising to the ranks of the Lords. Even if they overcame ruin past the fifth generation, the label that had been once slapped on them would never come off.

He could live with what happened to himself, but those magi had taken away even the futures of those who followed after him. At that instant, Darnic abandoned the idea of reaching the Root through the normal approach—in other worst, by accumulating diligent research as a magus and gradually climbing up the political ladder within the Association—as a dream that would never be granted.

Therefore, he first had to think of a method to stop the ruin of his clan. And then he had to search for a path to reach the Root.

There was also the option of simply withdrawing from the Association of Magi and continuing his clan's research while hiding themselves amidst the world. But Darnic refused to do that.

Naturally, remaining in the Association was humiliating. But Darnic carved that humiliation into his heart without forgetting any bit of it for even a second—and used it as nourishment.

At that time, he coincidently learned about the Holy Grail War in Fuyuki City. He involved Nazi Germany, who were interested in the occult, obtained the power of their army, and participated in the war as a Master.

It was fortunate for him that the situation had turned extremely chaotic due to the Einzberns, who had committed an act of foul play that broke the war's rules.

…The Third Holy Grail War concluded with no definite victor, and the exhausted Einzbern, Tohsaka and Makiri families had possessed no means by then to stop Darnic and the German Nazis.

According to rumors floating around, the Einzberns apparently still hadn't given up on the Holy Grail and were trying to make a new one. The Tohsaka gave up on the Holy Grail and searched for another method to reach the Root in Fuyuki. The Makiri was a clan that had already begun falling into decay even back then. There was no news of them, but the Third Holy Grail War had most likely dealt a decisive blow to them.

Darnic no longer felt any resentment towards the clan who had forsaken him. When he considered the present, he even felt like thanking them. Though, they had already fallen to ruin as a clan long ago, without leaving their names in history at all—

It wasn't that Darnic had direct hand in bring about their ruin. They were simply cornered politically. They had merely invested funds into a futile experiment, leaked the details of the hidden ritual, and the child who had inherited their clan's Magic Crest had coincidentally and unfortunately died in an accident during the experiment.

They, who flattered Darnic and were even prepared to sell themselves to him now that they had come to ruin, were the only clan to whom he refused the request to join Yggdmillennia. Following that, he knew that they had headed to Japan in the Far East where the Holy Grail War had once taken place, but their whereabouts were unknown after that. Mostly likely, they had lived out their lives while lamenting everything until their death.

Human life consists of continuing to defeat someone else. And right now, the ones he must defeat are the Association of Magi and the other magi of his clan.

Of course, he felt no hesitation. Whether it be defeating members of his own clan or making his Servant use a Noble Phantasm that he had deemed taboo.

Darnic's expression right now was enough to terrify anyone who knew his usual self. It was inhumane and cold, as if frozen in place, with not even a fragment of emotion showing through it.

Right now, he was thinking of something terribly crafty and vicious. If necessary, he wouldn't hesitate to fall to any and all sorts of corruption. The reason he purposely went outside was because of this. So that he wouldn't inspire any unnecessary wariness in the others.

"—Now then. What to do?"

He thought it over for a short while. And then, Darnic came to a single conclusion. The decision and determination to not balk at dirtying himself with blood was necessary, but that was surely something that he hardly had to be asked to do at this late hour.

***

—One-sided was the only way to describe it.

From the beginning, the two of them were in different leagues from each other in terms of their status as Heroic Spirits, the age of their mysteries and everything else.

With bestial instincts, Saber of Red didn't bother to block Rider of Black's golden lance and instead continued to cleverly dodge his attacks.

This was the lance that, though its offensive power was effectively nil, had the extremely fatal ability to "forcefully make a Servant's legs vanished"—**Down with a Touch!**.

Trap of Argalia

But that ability was also useless if it couldn't deliver a direct hit. It wasn't that Rider of Black was inexperienced with handling a lance. Rather, he had participated in many jousting matches and reached a level where normal knights could not compete with him.

However, Saber of Red was not a normal knight. She was Mordred, the illegitimate child of Arthur Pendragon, the King of Knights himself, and an uncommon child prodigy who had studied, stolen, and altered her father's techniques to make them her own.

"Too slow!"

Saber of Red's full-body armor was obviously in the heavyweight class even from an outsider's perspective. Even if it was made of prana, its weight didn't change. Rider of Black, who had confidence in his nimbleness, tried to completely ransack her with his speed.

But the one who was falling behind was none other than Rider of Black. He was desperately blocking Saber of Red's sword with his lance. On the blade's edge, red sparks of lightning danced before disappearing.

This was Saber of Red's prana. Since she was releasing her insane amount of prana that practically gushed out of her entire body, his arms went numb just by blocking the blade of her sword. Rider of Black was terrified. He could feel it each time their weapons clashed—her flame-like violent passion that mixed together madness, hatred, and the joy of battle.

"Ah, damn it, I've got other things to do, you know… Just die already!"

Clicking her tongue, Saber of Red muttered that with a very annoyed tone. In response, Rider of Black did what was his natural specialty and which always annoyed his opponent the most—he smiled.

"No, no, don't say that. How about keeping me company a while longer?"

"Enough prattling—!!"

And Saber of Red also had a low boiling point. Overwhelmed with anger, she grated her teeth and launched an even more severe attack.

It was terrifying. And yet even so, it was just barely within what could be called 'sword technique'.

As he exchanged blows with him, Rider of Black understood. Her sword skills possessed the conflicted yet perfect balance between the ferocity of a Berserker and the skill of a Saber.

To use a comparison, take a ferocious wild monkey. Say it was taught to fight to receive food and pitted against thousands of 'enemies'. Of course, it didn't have the intelligence to learn fighting techniques. But, if instinct trained it, numerous battles sharpened its mind, and the reward for doing so satisfied it…

Then what was produced in the end was an ultimate monster that had mastered not fighting techniques, but 'something else'.

Saber of Red's sword skills were extremely close to that. It was a sword technique that was produced only by those who continued fighting, fighting and killing, throwing away things like etiquette and chivalry and using it only for the sake of survival and slaughter.

No one but her could master this technique, and no one but her was compatible with the logic behind it. It was the technique of a lion, created and mastered by Mordred alone.

"Kuh…!!"

Sparks flew as lance and sword clashed. Since the battle had started until now, Saber of Red had been overwhelming Rider of Black.

But Saber of Red was the one who was irritated.

—Damn it, I can't deal a finishing blow.

Saber of Red's Instinct skill, which resembled physic perception, was warning her not to let herself be hit by that golden shining lance. Even if she thought that receiving a single blow from the lance's blunt tip wouldn't have much effect on her, her instincts wouldn't allow it.

As a result, her dodging movements got slightly bigger and wider, and she couldn't follow up with a counterattack with her blade well. It wasn't enough to make her attacks sloppy, but it was true that she couldn't put her full power behind it.

Should she just ignore her instincts and try receiving an attack—? That thought came to mind, but she immediately dismissed it. That lance was a Noble Phantasm. And as long as it was a Noble Phantasm, she had to remain cautious of it no matter how low its power was.

It would be fatal for her if it had some ability like immobilizing what it hit or weakening the enemy's movements. No, Saber of Red didn't think that Rider of Black would just charge at an enemy of the most powerful class like her without some plan in mind.

She shut out her irritation… Her impatience right now wasn't out of worry about losing. She was just impatient to get this over with so that the entire battle wouldn't end before she could fight other Servants, especially that Archer of Black who she couldn't conclude her fight with earlier.

So, shutting out her impatience, Saber of Red determinedly waited for Rider of Black to show an opening.

—*Now!*

And then, that chance came. She repelled the lance upwards with all her power and drove her sword into his defenceless abdomen. His chainmail might as well not have existed in the face of her sword.

"Gah…!"

At the last moment, Rider of Black put all his power into twisting his body. This act succeeded, at least the very least letting him avoid instant death as it only pierced his flank instead.

But could it really be called a success? Rider of Black no longer had the strength to endure the short time it would take for any healing spells or his own self-healing ability to take effect.

"—Well, it was fun."

Saber of Red said that and raised Clarent over her head to prepare for a big swing. Rider of Black forcibly raised his face, and murmured with a smile.

"…Preparations, complete."

Saber of Red frowned suspiciously at Rider of Black's words.

"Hey, what preparations are you talking about? Eh?"

—At that instant. With a speed that truly couldn't be caught with the naked eye. A strong attack by Berserker of Black, who had received a boost from a Command Spell, hit Saber of Red's defenceless back.

Deeming that this was an all-or-nothing battle, Caules had used his second Command Spell. According to Archer of Black's diagnosis, Saber of Red didn't have a defensive-type Noble Phantasm that was close to a Conceptual Weapon like Saber of Black or Rider of Red did. He had judged that her helmet merely served to hide her true name and abilities, and had no other powers.

In that case, this attack should, at the very least, get through. Particularly since Berserker's mace was a weapon that dealt impacts instead of slashes. It was especially useful against enemies covered entirely in armor.

The impact between the armor and the mace was like the sound of a car being crushed in a car press machine. Berserker of Black felt feedback from her blow. Rider, who watched the attack from beginning to end, was also certain it had hit.

However.

"—That's, impossible."

The one who deserved shock and admiration wasn't Berserker of Black, who had taken careful aim and hit with her mace just as planned. It was Saber of Red, who had received that attack and yet, instead of being blown away, hadn't moved, as if she rooted to the ground.

Caules, who watched through his familiars, the attacker Berserker, and even Rider could not hide their shock.

"Berserker… Even if a small fry like you is added to the battle…"

Saber of Red's voice was penetratingly cold, as if stifling pain and anger beneath it. She firmly turned the point of her sword towards Rider of Black. Rider of Black, who had tried to stab her with his lance at the same time as Berserker, couldn't move a single step lest he be skewered.

"—uu—uu!"

'This is bad. Get away, Berserker!'

At nearly the same time as Caules' order, Berserker, seized by a premonition of 'death', immediately jumped backwards by a full twenty meters. She disappeared amidst the crowd of golems who happened to be standing there.

And immediately after. Berserker and Rider of Black were made to realize once more just how much Saber of Red towered above them as a Heroic Spirit.

"—Did you think you could beat me!?"

She leapt forward. No, it was already at the level where she wasn't just leaping, but was *shot* forward. Saber of Red was a loaded bullet, and the gun hammer had just hit the detonator.

Through Saber of Red's skill [Prana Bust]—she, the bullet, flew out from the riffled gun barrel while spinning, and shot without wavering straight towards her target, Berserker.

And the large sword she held ready was a warhead. Even with Saber's face completely covered by her helmet, Berserker definitely felt it.

—This Servant is smiling with a sneer on her face right now.

Saber's slash swung in an arc and exploded through all the surrounding golems. 'Explode' was truly the right word. A shock wave and red lightning burst out from the blade, and the surrounding golems were reduced to rubble just by the aftershock.

The Black Masters who observed this scene and the Servants who saw it could only gasp.

"—No, way."

That strained mutter from somebody was a sentiment that everyone there agreed with in the depths of their hearts. That was how amazing and absurd the attack was. And what was more terrifying was that this wasn't a Noble Phantasm. It was just a normal attack launched with the full power of a Heroic Spirit.

'Berserker…!!'

Caules desperately called out to her through their telepathic communication. Berserker gave no sign of responding to it. She wasn't dead; her Master Caules could tell that much. But—what state was she in after receiving that attack just now?

Saber of Red cleared away the smoke with a swing of her blade. Catching sight of Berserker and noticing her current state, Saber's face twisted with hatred.

"You—"

'Hey, did you get her?'

After her Master cut in with telepathic communication, Saber replied with a displeased voice.

"I hit her. I hit her, but she's still alive. She's alive and struggling unseemly on the ground."

'...You're really in a bad mood, aren't you? So, have you figured out her true identity?'

"Not really. But—this girl isn't human. Rather, I'm doubtful that she's any kind of living creature. It feels like she's… kinda similar to a homunculus."

'A homunculus?'

"The arm I chopped off has cables running through it instead of blood vessels. Master, is there any Heroic Spirit like that?"

'An artificial life-form, huh… I get the feeling that… I might or might not have heard about such a Heroic Spirit.'

"Hey, which is it, Master? …Well, it doesn't matter either way. Learning the true name of a Servant that's about to die is useless knowledge."

'Wait, wait… an artificial life-form… I'll ask just in case, but her entire body isn't that of a machine, right?'

"Her flesh is full of patched-together defective parts. She's not a machine… well, who cares. I'm going to deal the finishing blow now."

To 'kill' a Servant', it was necessary to smash their spiritual core. So she just needed to destroy the organs which connected to it, her heart or brain.

Without hesitation, Saber of Red stabbed her sword into Berserker's chest. Berserker of Black received the sword without resisting. She just twitched the instant the blade was thrust in.

"—It's over."

Now that Berserker had received a fatal wound, Saber no longer cared about her. Her next target was Rider of Black. When she turned around, she saw Rider charging at her with his lance ready.

He was fast. But with his wounds still not completely healed, his attack was only just slightly above average for a Heroic Spirit. She was confident that she could handle even a hundred of such attacks.

"Come at me, dog!"

She was confident. She would block Rider's lance with her sword and decapitate him in the blink of an eye. And thus the battle would end. Though the rank of her Instinct wasn't high enough to be called future foresight, it still easily guided her to the optimum answer in this scene.

There was a ten to one odds that Rider of Black would be killed. It didn't seem like any miracle would happen, so now she just had to concentrate.

Saber of Red was correct. But one of her calculations was insufficient. Not a small fry like a battle-type homunculus or golem—nor even another Servant. But rather, if there was a 'fluke' that shouldn't exist in this world.

Then all her calculations would turn brittle and fall apart.

"—!?"

First, Rider of Black slowed his charge while making a shock expression. Next, a small human figure appeared in the corner of her vision.

Berserker of Black—it was not. It was just a rank-and-file homunculus. He was carrying a slender sword and charging at her just like Rider. His attack was unexpectedly fast for a small fry, though.

But something like that was still nothing more than a mosquito sting to her. Saber of Red ignored him and focused on Rider of Black.

If he collided with him, she would just repel his attack and take him down with one hand. Then it would be over. That's what she predicted, but Saber of Red still felt a lingering unease.

It wasn't anything on the level of a premonition. It was just a small and trivial uneasy feeling. So Saber ignored it and prepared herself to kill the charging Rider of Black.

Rider of Black shook off his shock and, as if driven by some impatience, charged at Saber even faster.

The first to reach Saber was the homunculus. But his sword thrust would probably bounce off Saber's full-body armor. There was no way it wouldn't. At the very least, it was impossible that her armor would lose to the likes of a slash from a homunculus.

…However, the weapon that the homunculus held was none other than the sword of a Servant. Though not a Noble Phantasm, its sharpness was incomparable with commonplace weapons held by other rank-and-file soldiers.

Still, there would have been no problem if its wielder was an ordinary homunculus. But—

—He didn't act according to any rational thought. Without considering anything, he threw away even his own life.

Rider of Black's charge was going to fail. Sieg understood that. The hero who had saved him would be cruelly defeated and killed before his eyes.

That was the one thing that he absolutely couldn't stand. His heartbeat had sent blood pumping strongly through his entire body, and put strength into his feet as he firmly stepped on the ground.

He yelled. *I don't need anything,* he thought. Even if this attack was a meaningless act. Even if it would only extend Rider of Black's life by just a little longer.

The option to abandon Rider and live a peaceful life—was completely meaningless in Sieg's eyes.

Saber of Red's final mistake in her calculations was concerning her full-body armor. She had forgotten. True, Saber had withstood the fully-powered and Command Spell-enhanced attack by Berserker.

But that didn't mean she wasn't injured. The part of her armor that had directly received the attack by the mace had been bent and caved in.

Therefore, it was only natural that that part of her armor alone was now brittle. The homunculus' eyes had definitely grasped the existence of what could be rightly called a catastrophe point in her armor.

Saber and Sieg each shared a heavy shock. For Sieg, it was the physical collision after charging into her with his shoulder and the resulting terrible pain that wracked his entire body. But Saber wasn't concerned with that.

"Wh—at?"

Before feeling any pain, she was dumbstruck. That slender sword had pierced her prided full-body armor. Blood was slowing flowing out from her abdomen. Her rage instantly dissipated, and in its place, a frozen killing intent ruled Saber's mind.

"—Who the hell are you?"

Sieg remained silent as he pulled out the slender sword and readied to use it again. It wasn't that he didn't reply, but that he couldn't. The Servant in front of him wasn't mad with rage, but was just facing him while her face remained concealed behind her steel helmet—and as a result, Sieg couldn't even open his mouth to speak.

"…If you won't answer, I don't mind that either. I just decided that I'm going to kill you."

"—kuh!! Stop, Saber!"

Rider of Black charged once more. He attacked from a low stance as if gliding forward, but Saber of Red blocked it with her sword and, in recompense for his blind and naïve charge, dealt him a severe elbow strike.

"Guh…!!"

She had aimed for the spot that still hadn't completely healed from the earlier slash, and so even more blood gushed out from his abdomen. Even as he collapsed to the ground, Rider of Black glared at Saber of Red with a desperate expression.

Saber spoke to Rider with a look that contained a trace of pity.

"Unfortunately, I've already confirmed this guy as an enemy. If he were just a bit weaker, he could have found another path."

Saber of Red readied her silver sword, completely focused on her intention to kill. The sword was pointed not at Rider, but at the homunculus. As if in a trance, Sieg gazed straight at Saber's valiant form. *How terrifying,* he thought. *I'm going to die,* he predicted. And yet, somehow his emotions were numbed. He was practically close to a serene state of mind.

His heartbeat was no faster than usual. It seemed this heart didn't accelerate its pulse out of fear. *As expected of a hero,* Sieg thought, admiring in his heart the man who had been Saber of Black, Siegfried.

…The match was over in a single blow.

Sieg didn't even have the time to swing his sword as Saber of Red's slash torn through his chest. Her blade slashed through him from the shoulder down and eventually reached his heart.

"—See ya. I'll carve the memory of you into my heart, nameless homunculus."

Those were without a doubt, words of praise by Saber of Red. Vivid blood gushed out, and yet another homunculus fell dying to the ground. It was a scene that had repeated countless times since earlier on this battlefield.

But at that instant, all the homunculi who had been made to participate in this Great Holy Grail War had their breaths catch in their throats… All of them knew about him. All of them understood why he had returned as well.

They were unable to neither support nor assist him. But they sympathized with him. They had wished blessings upon him, the only one among them who had chosen to be free.

The battle wasn't over. The golems, Dragon Tooth Warriors, and even the homunculi didn't rest their hands. But at this moment, the homunculis created by Yggdmillennia felt that everything was over.

While a gloomy shadow spread among them that no one besides their fellows noticed—the homunculi continued struggling to fight and survive on the battlefield.

Saber of Red turned to face Rider of Black next.

"—Sorry for making you wait."

"…"

Rider of Black was silent. His head, tilted downwards, had lost any trace of his usual carefree smile.

"Here I come, Saber of Red. I won't forgive you."

"Hah, enough with being moved by feelings! This is a battlefield. Of course I'm going to kill those who face me as an enemy. Even more so for those who wound me!"

"Yeah, I know that. I know that, but there's no way that I, Astolfo, can agree with that kind of logic!!"

As Rider of Black yelled, Saber of Red gave a faint smiled filled with provocation, planning to intercept him this time, but she couldn't help stopping her attack due to a sudden telepathic communication.

The speaker was, naturally, her Master Shishigou.

'Hey. What happened to Berserker of Black!?'

Though she felt doubtful over the unclear purpose of this question, Saber of Red replied honestly.

'What's with you, Master? If it's about Berserker, she's already—'

'Did you properly confirm that her body dispersed and vanished!?'

'...No, I didn't confirm her death that far.'

But even without doing that, she definitely felt that she had delivered the finishing blow. While remaining attentive of Rider of Black, she turned her head back slightly to look at where Berserker had fallen—and confirmed that there was no one there.

"What…!?"

Even while shocked, Saber scanned her surroundings. The Servant hadn't simply vanished after dying. As proof of that, Berserker's mace was planted upright into the ground. It reminded her of a grave-marker, but she immediately noticed something strange about it.

When she received Saber's slash, Berserker of Black should have dropped that mace. And yet, when had that mace been planted into the ground like that?

Perhaps because the scene of it planted there was far too odd, her attention was caught by the mace. The next instant, as if having timed it, Berserker of Black fell down from the sky and grabbed onto Saber of Red's back.

"Kuh… get off!!"

Saber of Red, having survived upon the battlefield for a long time, understood. This was definitely a suicide attack. Berserker was about to fire off something even if it meant sacrificing herself to do it.

"NAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA——————————OOU!!

While screaming like a ferocious beast or a deceased spirit from hell, Berserker of Black still desperately clung to Saber of Red's back.

Prana swelled up from within her in a whirlwind, and it began to create a huge twister with her at the center.

"Berserker!"

Rider of Black desperately shouted while blocking the dust that was trying to get into his eyes with one hand.

But the one to respond to him wasn't Berserker.

'—That's enough, Rider. Berserker is activating her Noble Phantasm. Withdraw from there.'

It was the unpleasantly cold voice of his Master. Naturally, Rider objected.

'No way. Saber is…'

'Be quiet. If you stay there, you'll die, you know? Do you want me to use a Command Spell?'

Even while gritting his teeth at those words, Rider moved away to somewhere that seemed safe to him. When he cooled his head, he was shocked to realize where he came to a stop.

He was now more than a hundred meters from where the two female Servants were. In other words, Rider's body had instinctively judged that it would be dangerous if he didn't get this far away.

Rider of Black knew that Berserker had two Noble Phantasms. The first was a continuously-active-type Noble Phantasm, **Maiden's Chastity** (Bridal Chest). And the second was—

"…**Lightning Branch of Crucifixion** (Blasted Tree),."

It was a forbidden Noble Phantasm that would drive Berserker of Black herself to death as well.

Caules didn't know what he should say to Berserker.

He just couldn't stop her. It wasn't because she was suited to killing Saber of Red or anything like that.

Caules hadn't ordered her to do so. He hadn't been coerced by another Master or Fiore either. Caules just somehow thought that Berserker would probably do so, and Berserker had tried to activate her Noble Phantasm without him even having to use a Command Spell.

'...Berserker. I'll back you up with a Command Spell.'

The Command Spell was neither to protect her nor to make her withdraw. It was a boost. The more narrowly-defined an order was, and the more instantaneous it was, the stronger the effect of the Command Spell was. And if the Servant agreed with the Master's order, an even greater effect would manifest.

In this case, if Caules ordered Berserker to use her Noble Phantasm at maximum power, it would be able to exceed its normal output.

With that much, it would probably be powerful enough to kill Saber of Red.

'—uu.'

Her groan of agreement rang through the telepathic link so well it was depressing. At this moment, Caules *regretted* in the depths of his heart that Berserker of Black was Frankenstein.

It would have better if she were simply mad. It would have better if she were a mad warrior that didn't even recognize her Master's face, couldn't communicate and just slaughtered the enemy.

If so, he wouldn't hesitate so much over using his last remaining Command Spell. From the beginning, he wasn't even proactively participating in this Greater Holy Grail war, and he had no wish to grant either.

He should have parted with Berserker without regrets, laments, or even sorrow.

…And yet. What he recalled in his mind was the image of her plucking flowers with a vast expression on her face and throwing them away without picking the flower petals. Of her simply gazing at the ripped-up pieces of the flowers dancing upon the wind.

His heart hurt as if it were being ripped apart—but he endured it. He didn't shed tears; from the beginning, he shouldn't have had the right to do so. The one being killed was her, and the one killing her was him. He couldn't break that.

With a voice so cold he hated it, he began speaking the words.

'The fifth Black Master orders you with a Command Spell.'

He casted away his meager and short memories of her.

'—Release all your limiters. Activate your Noble Phantasm ***Blasted Tree*** *and kill Saber of Red.'*

The sky split apart. The enormous prana that Berserker of Black had gathered up was making the fins on the tail end of her mace spin at high speeds.

"You…!"

Saber's voice was twisted with irritation. Giving a faint smile, Berserker of Black spoke back to her.

"—You're, coming, with me."

From the sky to the earth, or perhaps from the earth to the sky, bluish-white light rained down like a waterfall.

"——!!"

The lightning strike overran the world completely. Everything within a hundred meter radius was completely destroyed, leaving not even a single fragment.

Anyone who saw it was convinced that Saber of Red had died. Excluding exceptions among exceptions like Rider of Red, no matter how powerful the Servant was, it should have been impossible for one to be all right after being hit by the attack just now.

The attack Berserker of Black had released by wagering her life was truly tenacious.

"Did she get her…?"

But they had forgotten one thing. The ones fighting in this Great Holy Grail War consisted of not only Servants. Though no one caught sight of them on the battlefield, there were still those who had gathered to fight alongside the Servants.

Yes. Like how Caules had boosted Berserker of Black's attack with a Command Spell.

"Wha…"

Rider of Black was stricken speechless by the sight of the Servant who had appeared right before his eyes, surrounded by black smoke and smelling extremely unpleasantly of scorched flesh.

Saber of Red was before him.

"…Damn it, I couldn't dodge it."

Saber of Red muttered that in a calm manner.

'Come on, don't say that. Shouldn't you be thinking how great it is that at least you weren't disintegrated?'

'Shut up. It would have been better if you used the Command Spell one second sooner, Master.'

'It wouldn't have changed anything. In the first place, you shouldn't have received any injuries when I transported you outside of the danger zone. But that lightning chased after you and even tried to drag you back into the center of it… Most likely, Berserker was ordered to [kill Saber of Red] with a Command Spell. That's what caused you to sustain injuries.'

With the additional support of a Command Spell, it had truly been a fully-powered attack. The only way to have survived it was with a Command Spell of their own.

Saber of Red's Master, Shishigou Kairi, hadn't hesitated to use it. He ordered her to withdraw to somewhere safe with a Command Spell. A 'teleportation' that was nearly equivalent to the concept of time already tread upon the domain of sorcery. The reason Shishigou Kairi, a mere magus, was able to use this highest level of spells that even a witch from the Age of Gods could

only use in their personal domain was thanks to the enormous amount of prana contained in the Command Spell.

…And even after all that, Saber still wasn't completely unwounded.

Caules' Command Spell had also crossed into the concept of space, and as a result had distorted even cause and effect to make the **Blasted Tree** hit Saber of Red.

But the Command Spell's abundant prana was consumed in order to do that, and so hadn't been able to add its power to the Noble Phantasm's output itself. As a result, Saber of Red had gotten away with only severe wounds. It would take a bit of time, but healing those injuries was easy.

"—Damn it!"

Caules struck the stone wall with his fist, causing the skin to split and blood to flow out from it. He didn't even notice the stinging pain due to the heat raging through his head. After confirming that his Servant had died, he had silently left the room where the other Masters were and struck his vexation against the corridor wall. As expected, he didn't want to show such unsightly behavior in front of other magi.

"…That wasn't a mistake."

Perhaps noticing her younger brother's lamenting, Fiore followed him and said that, but Caules shook his head in denial of her words and shouted.

"No, it was a mistake! My mistake was betting on a desperate gamble even knowing that the enemy also had Command Spells. If the enemy's Command Spell had just been a few seconds slower… if I had just firmly decided to support Berserker with a Command Spell a few seconds sooner, this wouldn't have happened! Then I wouldn't have made her… made Berserker die in vain!"

I blundered. I made an error in judgement. Caules tortured himself with those thoughts. From Fiore's perspective, he was half-right, half-wrong.

That mistake was an unavoidable mistake, as she saw it. Caules and Berserker had definitely done their very best in confronting Saber of Red. The enemy's power had simply exceeded theirs.

"At the very least, Saber sustained heavy injuries, right?"

It wasn't in vain, Fiore thought. That attack, filled with Berserker's will, shouldn't have been in vain. But Caules, as a magus, shook his head and denied that.

"As long as the enemy Master can use healing magecraft, it can still be healed… I'm fine, Nee-san, so hurry up and go back to commanding the others."

"But—"

"It's fine, just go already."

Caules said that in a forced tone of voice, and in the end, Fiore returned to the room to lead the others. Now alone, Caules leaned his back against the corridor wall and covered his face, thinking to himself.

...When that first attack didn't end up being decisive, should I have made her withdraw?

...Was it a mistake to try and kill Saber of Red with a surprise attack?

...In the first place, was my decision to try it out with Berserker foolish?

Naturally, there had been reasons for why he had done so. If they didn't kill Saber of Red there, there was a high chance that their faction's Rider would have been killed instead.

Lancer and Archer, who were fighting with their full power, hadn't been having as much difficulty with their respective formidable opponents.

What should he have done? How could he have won; how could he have saved her? He thought and thought it over in agony, and the conclusion he came to was simply the most ordinary and worst one; that there was nothing he could have done.

They couldn't afford to lose Rider, and at that time the only one who could quickly rush over there was Berserker. Berserker had also been searching for another enemy to fight after losing sight of Caster of Red and the Master she was chasing.

No, even if he mourned and lamented, he couldn't do anything anymore.

…Berserker of Black had died. Caules' Greater Holy Grail War also ended here. The Command Spells on his right hand had disappeared after having all been used up. His connection to this war had been completely severed.

He felt a pain that was bitterer than he had imagined gouging through his chest. Even so, Caules had intended to resolve himself as a magus should. He might die, he might be killed or kill in turn, and at worst, all his other clan members including his older sister might be killed—he had been prepared for that.

Right now, what was gouging through his chest were thoughts of a completely different kind. It was a pain he hadn't even imagined until he summoned his Servant and fought in the war. He hadn't thought that Berserker's would carve such a deep wound inside his heart.

'I wasn't able to do anything for her.'

Her wish was something that could be granted by the Holy Grail. She possessed exceptionally high reason for the Berserker class and, more than anything else, she was an easy-to-handle Servant.

He hated himself for having thought she was just someone who shared mutual interest in obtaining the Holy Grail during those short few days. She was a precious comrade who had established a bond and fought together with him. No, she had *become such a comrade* to him.

That's why her death was so sad.

But the past could never be changed—and a Servant that went back to the [Throne] could never return either.

The girl, who, despite having the appearance of a human, had been forced to be a monster, had only the meager wish of wanting a being of the same kind as her—[someone] who she could love and would love her back.

Caules simply regretted that he hadn't been able to grant her wish.

Saber of Red was heavily wounded, but it wasn't enough to hinder her fighting movements as long as Shishigou Kairi applied healing magecraft right away. In other words, just as Caules had said, the use of Berserker of Black's Noble Phantasm could be considered extremely meaningless as an attack.

But this Noble Phantasm had one other hidden ability. There was a paragraph in Frankenstein's blueprints that even Caules hadn't paid attention to. There, it was written thus.

'This lightning attack is not simply lightning, but rather a power that has Frankenstein's will imbedded within it. As long as it exists, she will never perish.'

At the same time as the lightning attack turned the surrounding area to rubble, Sieg, who had been lying on the ground there, received a sudden shock to his heart. It suddenly contracted and expanded. The blood flow that should have halted resumed. The prana that Frankenstein had released was absorbed into him and blood began circulating through his entire body.

—The first thing that the boy who had given himself the name Sieg felt was pain.

***

"Wha…!?"

Even Ruler, who received knowledge concerning all Servants when she was summoned, couldn't helped but be shocked by the appearance of what appeared before her.

"Hmm. You over there, you—aren't a Black Servant, are you? Hmm, Ruler, then?"

The speaker had a clear voice like the wind, with a body so thin and light it was like a tree leaf swaying in the wind.

The green girl spun through the air and landed next to Ruler. In her hand was a large bow that didn't suit her stature.

"—Archer of Red."

Ruler was, of course, on guard. It was only natural after having been attacked by Lancer and (probably) Caster of Red.

But Archer of Red looked at Ruler as if doubting her and spoke.

"What? You're a mediator, right? Don't you understand who you should be on guard against right now?"

"—No. Naturally, I understand …"

Those words came from the bottom of her heart. Ruler lessened her caution towards Archer somewhat. Most likely, the Red faction wasn't monolithic. At the very least, Archer and her Master didn't seem to consider Ruler a target to be killed.

Yes, right now, the one she should be on guard against wasn't her.

"…The second Berserker on the Black faction's side, Spartacus… huh?"

Berserker of Red had been captured by Lancer of Black and forced to change Masters. In other words, despite being Berserker of Red, he was fighting the Red faction as an enemy right now.

Ruler had no issue with that. In the Holy Grail War, allied Servants turning around and becoming enemies was far from impossible.

But—

"Oooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo[1]———!!"

Was this actually possible? For an instant, Ruler mistook it for a hill. Next, the thought 'Is that a pile of corpses?' flashed through her mind—and finally, she had no choice but to arrive at a conclusion that rejected both those guesses.

"Berserker… is it?"

"Yeha. I didn't think it would become this *terrible*. I keep shooting and shooting at him, but his body just enlarges and reinforces itself, and now he's already forgetting his human form. To think Berserker would go this mad."

As a related party, Archer of Red sighed as if amazed.

What stood in front of the two of them was truly a hill-like monster. If it were simply large, Ruler wouldn't have become speechless like this.

What left her at a loss for words was Berserker of Red's current state.

He had eight arms. Three of them had no bones in them, let alone joints. They were like octopus tentacles, but when they were swung, they became like whips and smashed through the enemy.

His log-like legs had multiple insect-like legs sprouting out from them, most likely to divide up the weight since two legs alone couldn't support him.

His head had sunk into his neck, but upper and lower jaws like that of a Tyrannosaurus Rex stuck out from the top of his shoulders.

Crying Warmonger
—**Howl of the Wounded Beast**.

It's already more like a kind of curse than a Noble Phantasm, Ruler thought. He lived, he moved, and more than anything else… he still sought the battlefield and victory.

Part of the damage dealt to him was converted into prana and accumulated to raise his abilities. Most likely, that also included his ability to heal. He received damage, converted it into prana, raised his abilities, and used self-healing. There wasn't even any room for his Master to intervene.

The problem was that this form of recycling continued revolving to the point it was abnormal. Due to his healing ability going out of control, his body broke away from its proper form. And yet his abilities kept being raised due to receiving damage, and so his body rapidly transformed into a grotesque form.

Height and weight were the easiest factors to use to conjecture the strength of humans. Even those called Heroic Spirits—almost all had the same basic human form.

But Berserker of Red had already discarded that. Eight arms were stronger than two. If his weight was too great to support, then just increase the number of legs.

To the mad warrior who believed in the creed that victory came closer, not farther, the more one was wounded, a situation of this degree was probably trifling.

"There, you, are—!!"

Five eyes, located in various places on Berserker's shoulders, neck and abdomen, all turned to glare at Archer of Red and Ruler. The two female Servants instantly separated to the left and right respectively as if flicked away. Not caring about that, Berserker of Red swung his sword with all his might.

Pieces of the ground that he blew away and smashed apart flew at Ruler and Archer like high-explosive projectiles.

"Guh—!"

"Kuh…!!"

Rocks tore through their skin and even damaged part of Ruler's armor. An attack without prana accompanying it could never harm a Servant. But prana had been loaded to the point of bursting into the sword he swung, and it had even contaminated the broken pieces of stone.

It was the same as a Servant throwing dirks with prana loaded into them… Though, it was the first time Ruler had witness of the phenomenon of prana clinging even to fragments smashed apart with a sword.

"Hmm. It seems I ended up dragging you into this. Forgive me, Ruler."

Ruler gently shook her head at Archer of Red's apology.

"No, I have a lot of experience with trifles like this… However, due to my position, I won't be facing him as an enemy either. Since any damage he does is limited to this battlefield."

"Hmm. Well, I have no complaints in regards to that, but—"

Archer of Red looked at Ruler with a sour expression. Ruler's face stiffened at the sudden chill that came upon her.

"…What is it?"

"It's an *order from my Master*. I'm to immediately withdraw from here."

"Umm, you couldn't mean…"

After sighing, Archer of Red patted Ruler on the shoulder as if to console her.

"Sorry about this, but I leave the rest to you."

"Wai—"

Archer of Red, Atalanta. One of the heroes in Greek legend who were boasted of being swift runners. Her feet weren't something that even Ruler could chase after.

Before Ruler even opened her mouth to say "Ah", Archer had disappeared in the forest—it wasn't that she went into spiritual form; she just ran off.

Ruler silently looked up. There stood a grotesque-looking hero… no, creature. Berserker aimed his gladius, which was now needle-sized compared to his body, at Ruler.

That's right. Berserker of Red—Spartacus was a fighter who rebels against all those with power. Ruler was no exception to that.

"…I've been had."

Archer had no animosity towards her. But her Master seemed to have a different opinion.

The 'someone' she had to meet had already reached the Hanging Gardens. How should she chase after them…? It would have been nice if she had wings that could let her fly.

However, staying here meant that she would have to fight Berserker of Red, Spartacus. Should she invoke her 'privilege'?

No, he wouldn't stop unless he was ordered to die. Eliminating other Servants was something that Ruler shouldn't fundamentally do. Then should she withdraw? That was also another option that she could hardly call desirable. If she were alone, she might have withdrawn from here. But there was someone else she had left on this battlefield. A boy, who was small and weak, yet had a soul that was sturdy like steel.

At the very least, she had to join up with him, but right now he seemed to be talking with the homunculi back at the rear lines. Most likely in order to save his fellow homunculi, even if it meant doing so alone. Until that was finished, he wouldn't leave this battlefield.

In that case, she only had one remaining option.

"—Buy time, huh?"

Now that she had lost both the options to retreat and counterattack, the only thing Ruler could do was non-aggressive defence. If she protected herself, Servants from either the Black or Red faction would most likely have to repel him.

That was the optimistic scenario. In the worst case, neither the Black nor Red Servants would come to help her, instead waiting for Ruler and Berserker to take each other out.

This feeling of everyone turning against her. This situation, which would probably freeze the spine of a normal person, felt nostalgic to Ruler.

Scorn, hate, ridicule—even after receiving all those things, her faith had never wavered. To Ruler, who didn't even have a Master to fight alongside, being alone was normal.

...No, I'm not alone.

Though his goals were different, there was a boy who fought without seeking the Holy Grail. There was someone who knew her and had walked alongside her… Right now, that might be enough for her.

Berserker of Red howled—and Ruler readied her holy flag, saying, "Come at me."

Right before he swung down his gladius, Ruler repelled it with her holy flag. Two of his whip arms attacked her—and she blocked them both. But then, the third one, which had hidden behind them, swung at her—!

"Ugh, kuh—!!"

She received a direct hit. She was blown away and rolled across the ground. Luckily, the Dragon Tooth Warriors who had been ordered to kill her acted as cushions for her. In compensation for bringing her to a stop, three of them were smashed apart in a row, but she would have flown to the edge of the battlefield if not for that. That attack technique been done through Berserker's physical strength that was so great it was hard to believe and his prana that he had kept stockpiling.

No, perhaps the attack just now… shouldn't be called a 'technique'.

As she stood up, Ruler wiped blood from her lips. Ruler kept a backup of the body she was possessing—of Laeticia. When she achieved her objective or if she was killed midway through the war, at that instant, Laeticia's body would return to its original form as recorded in the backup and, depending on the situation, would be forcefully transported somewhere safe. With that process, no matter how many wounds this body received, it would immediately regenerate.

Therefore, it could be said there was no problem no matter how wounded she became, but… if she had received the blow just now while defenseless, she would have died.

As if having seen through her doubts, a pillar of light rained down from the sky.

"Wha…!?"

The seven-colored light, which would have seemed beautiful if this weren't a battlefield, was aimed not at Ruler, but at—

"OOOOOOOOOOOOOOooooooooOOOOOOOOOOOOO!?"

A howl that was mixed with both anguish and joy. Berserker of Red had received damage, and as a result his Noble Phantasm began healing the flesh that had been torn apart. But even the hero of rebellion Spartacus would probably soon be at his limit.

…No, he had already crossed over his limits. He had endured, endured, and endured every possible torture. All that was left was for him to spit it back out—

Instantly, Ruler understood the Red faction's aim in firing that pillar of light from the sky and Berserker's own aim.

What this howling man aimed to destroy were oppressors and their vassals… In other words…

"He intends to destroy everything here…!!"

Of course, the members of the Red faction were not an exception to that, but they were within the floating fortress. It was impossible for Berserker to go to a domain where his hands wouldn't reach.

The Dragon Tooth Warriors were simply rank-and-file soldiers to the Red faction. They had no intention of mourning the lives of mere artificial constructs.

On the other hand, the problem was the Black faction. This was probably an unanticipated situation for them as well. Who could have imagined that **Crying Warmonger** was such a malignant Noble Phantasm?

The abundant prana that Berserker had accumulated and his body that had been transformed by it were already beyond the binds of the Servant contract. Even using Command Spells, which even Heroic Spirits with A rank Magic Resistance could only endure a single one at a time, probably wouldn't work on him.

Because Command Spells were *shackles placed on those below by those above*. No matter how low one's rank was as a magus, as long as one was a Master, their position was superior to their Servant's.

With the hero of rebellion Spartacus, an order probably wouldn't be obeyed unless two Command Spells were used even in his normal state. In this situation, even using three Command Spells on him probably wouldn't work.

Yes, in other words, Berserker of Red wouldn't stop. Assuming he swung his next blow with all his might, the damage would most likely extend across this entire battlefield. On the contrary, even the Fortress of Millennia, which lay between the town and the battlefield, wouldn't be able to escape damage either.

Now then, what should I do—as Ruler wavered over her next course of action, she received a revelation. She felt numbing pain course through her Command Spells.

Astonished, Ruler looked off towards a certain direction. Even without being able to grasp it by sight, she could sense it from that overwhelming amount of prana.

Servant parameters were rewritten. It applied to two Servants. One was changed from being listed as healthy to dead, and the other went from a dying state to—

***

There was once a hero. A great hero who killed a dragon.

Flawless and perfect in all aspects, he was an impeccable great hero. A man who everyone adored, seeking his power and asking requests of him.

I was—happy, the hero thought. That didn't change until just before he died. He neither yielded to overwhelming power nor was crushed by despair.

The only thing he received were words and songs of blessing and praise. From the moment he was born till his death. *That had never changed,* the hero thought.

The very last wish that was asked of the perfect hero, who continued to be made requests of, was his own death.

A request that he carried out ended up coming back to him as punishment. His brother-in-law loved a certain woman and requested that the hero make her capitulate, and so it was settled by having the hero embrace that woman as his proxy. That may not have been a crime, but it wasn't behavior that could be praised either.

Due to knowledge of this spreading around, the hero wounded the woman's honor. He wounded the woman's pride. And she wasn't an ordinary woman, but the queen of a country. As a result, he sensed that it would cause a terrible conflict—and so he spoke to the man who he had once called a friend and who he should have exchanged cups of brotherhood with.

"Ah, the situation is beyond my control. Hagen, I am invincible and so have never once been wounded by you. But even so, if I don't have you kill me…"

The man who was once his friend granted the hero's wish. He tenaciously searched and found out the hero's weak point, crafted a plan knowing fully well that it was a cowardly act, and aimed for the hero's back as he drank water. Even while knowing that, the hero stopped himself from resisting.

Without leaving behind any unseemly figure or stupidity, the hero died as a tragic hero who received a sneak attack due to trickery. His former friend became widely known as a rare villain who had killed the hero through foul play.

Properly speaking, the story ended here. It should have become a tale where the conflict was resolved and the hero alone died a noble death.

…But it led to the worst of situations that was beyond what the hero had expected.

The woman who was the hero's wife burned with the flames of revenge and, as a result, many men died.

It was surely because the hero was loved by and befriended everyone. He probably couldn't truly understand something like a deep-rooted and blind love… a passionate love that repays the murder of one's loved one with twice the payback.

Or perhaps it was because he repeatedly responded to the requests made of him. Perhaps the woman who loved him thought he wouldn't do something if it wasn't requested of him.

As a result, his wish wasn't granted right until the very end. For the hero who had acted neither to defeat evil nor do good, but instead specialized in simply 'granting the requests of others', it was probably an inevitable conclusion.

But, right as he was on the verge of death, the hero had a faint thought. As he was confronted with death, 'what he wanted to do' finally became clear to him.

I lived and died as a hero. I have no regrets about that in itself. I can declare that there was not a single disagreeable thing in my life.

Even so, I can't help but think. If I weren't a prince, if I were just an ordinary man.

Wouldn't I have been able to earnestly pursue my own will?

It doesn't matter if I'm not acknowledged by anyone. I don't mind if I'm not praised by anyone. I want to acknowledge myself. I want to have pride in myself. There lies what I sought. What I wished for.

I want to stand on the side of what I believe in. If I could do that, then surely—I would be able to live with my chest puffed up proudly.

I won't fight for the sake of someone else. I won't fight for my own sake either.

For the sake of the benevolence that I believe in, the justice I believe in, the loyalty I believe in, and the love I believe in. I will take hold of this sword and fight with this body.

That is my dream, my wish.

I——want to be an ally of justice.

***

The strong pain running through the back of his left hand forcibly brought Sieg back to consciousness.

"Ugh…"

The pain, like that of a smoldering iron being pushed against his hand, gradually started to abate. It appeared he was alive. Feeling pain probably meant he was alive.

However, this wasn't the battlefield he had returned to along with Ruler. He felt the sensation of touching cold and hard rock surface. It seemed—he had come back to that place he had visited once before.

Perhaps worried about the vivid pain just now, Sieg unconsciously glanced at his left hand.

"Wh, at…?

He shivered. Sieg had been born possessing basic knowledge about the Holy Grail War. Therefore, it was natural that he feel so shocked it blew the pain out of his mind.

"Impossible, these are…!"

On the back of his left hand were three patterns. He naturally understood what they were. These were the proof of being a Master in the Holy Grail War—that is, Command Spells.

No, they were slightly different from normal Command Spells. It was natural for the patterns of the Command Spells to differ depending on the Master, but they should always be dyed a red color. But these ones were black instead.

Standing out on the surface of Sieg's white skin, the black patterns somehow seemed repulsive.

Suddenly, he felt the presence of a giant creature behind him. He was paralyzed with fear that numbed the tips of his hands and feet. His reason told him that he mustn't turn around. He tried not to be conscious of the sound and smell of the raw and deep breaths behind him.

But—the thing behind him definitely held malice towards him.

He had to fight it. He had to pick up a sword and fight it. And an ordinary sword was no good. Even the sword he had received from Rider of Black was no good.

What he needed was a magic sword that could even 'slay a dragon'. A blade so great it was extolled and had carved its name into legend.

—Stupid. Where could you find something like that?

—Stupid. ***You already have it.***

The thoughts that appeared in his mind were easily overturned by a whisper.

…In his right hand was a sword hilt. The blade itself was hallway stuck in the ground. It seemed he had to pull this out. In order to defeat the creature behind him, he had to pull out this sword—

Sieg didn't hesitate. He gripped the hilt tightly and tried to pull it out at once.

"Kuh…!"

But it wouldn't budge. Even when he used all his might, it wouldn't move a single millimeter. It was as if the blade was being held there tightly by someone.

If he didn't pull it out, he would die. When he saw the repulsive thing that shouldn't exist in this world, his body would be destroyed and his spirit would die. That would definitely happen if he didn't obtain the means to oppose it.

—This sword can't be pulled out by you.

—But, ***if it's you, you can do it.***

The Command Spells on his left hand flickered ominously… Command Spells contained abundant amounts of prana. They could overturn even the laws of nature and reproduce all possible phenomenon with magic, even crossing into a domain close to that of sorcery.

In that case, what power was necessary to pull out this blade?

—The one who it is requested of isn't you.

—The one who wishes for it isn't you.

…The answer had already been given to him. The heart he had received, the abundant prana he had obtained when he was revived. And the black Command Spells that had appeared on his hand.

All of it piled up. All of it began to advance in a single direction.

He couldn't oppose it. He didn't intend to either. Even if this might be a path that someone else had given him, he didn't mind.

—This is the path I choose.

—This is the path you chose.

I see. Then…

"…I order this body of mine with a Command Spell."

One of the Command Spells started shining white. Along with the light that swelled up, Sieg's body changed. The information of a Heroic Spirit was downloaded into his body. Physical information was expressed, battle experience was stored and accumulated, personal abilities were embodied, and even Noble Phantasms were reproduced.

But even a Command Spell could only reproduce that miracle for a short time.

A hundred and eighty seconds. That was the time limit of reproducing a Heroic Spirit with a Command Spell. After that time limit passed, Siegfried would return to being Sieg.

That's fine, he thought. *Even three minutes is enough if this body can be of use to him, if this body can become the power to save them.*

He didn't have an ounce of hesitation in him. As long as what he needed to hold in his hand was there. He would happily accept even ruin, decay and a miserable death.

What was essential wasn't putting strength in his right hand, but his will, and so he easily pulled out the sword. He returned to the hell overflowing with light.

Lastly, thinking he should at least see the form of the monster, he turned around—and he saw, for some reason, himself standing still there.

…He decided to leave thinking about this event for later. Right now, there was something he had to do. Sieg stopped thinking and chose to simply advance forward.

It was just a short three minutes. But even if it was just a short three minutes, the reproduction was perfect. In terms of physical abilities, Sieg had been perfectly reproduced as Saber of Black.

On his back was the Phantasmal Greatsword, Balmung. Covering his body here and there was silver armor. His chest had greatly expanded, exposing skin that was dyed brown with the blood of a dragon. That skin was composed of dragon scales that wouldn't be wounded by any blade or any spell. All except for a single part in the middle of his back…

What accomplished this miracle was the curse of a dragon, and what allowed that transformation was the heart of a dragon. Therefore, their name was **Dragon Revelation Command Spells**. A life crystalized in a hundred and eighty seconds, approaching death each time one was used.

Dead Count Shapeshifter

Thus, a hero of legend—the 'dragon-slayer' returned to stand on the earth.

***

It was an impact so strong that every Servant on the battlefield sensed it and froze. Just when it seemed that the abundant prana dispersed as if having exploded, a tremendous 'something' was born.

Rider of Red and Archer of Black, who were facing each other intensely, put a temporary hold to their battle and ran out of the forest—

Caster of Black suspended his control over the golems.

Lancer of Black and Lancer of Red turned their gaze to the 'something' even while remaining cautious of each other.

Archer of Red stopped running and looked at the 'something' with a dumbfounded expression.

Caster and Assassin of Red were unable to hide their shock either.

Even Berserker of Red stopped moving for an instant.

Saber of Red, even while doubting what had happened before her very eyes, sent an urgent telepathic communication to her Master.

'Hey, Master.'

'What?'

'Let me confirm. All the Black Servants have been summoned already, right!?'

'They should be.'

'...Then who's this guy standing in front of me!?'

'...I'm looking at him from the eyes of an owl, but he seems to be a Servant.'

'As far as I can see, he isn't Archer, Lancer, Rider, Berserker, Caster, or let alone Assassin. He's a Saber, the same Saber class as me. What's the meaning of this…!?'

'Hmm. Well, this is the Great Holy Grail War. Such things also happen.'

Shishigou said that in a light tone, and continued speaking without giving the confused Saber any time to give a rebuttal.

'Go and crush him. I've finished healing almost all of your wounds. Even if your opponent is a Saber, he's irregular… A normal Servant shouldn't lose against an abnormal one. Right?'

Understanding his words, Saber of Red discarded her doubts. She spoke in a light tone that matched Shishigou's.

'...I somehow feel like you're smoothly taunting me, though.'

'What, I don't really mind if you retreat. You should do what you want. What, do you want to retreat? Then shall I use another Command Spell to get you out of there?'

'—Ah, damn it. You're taunting me, you're definitely taunting me! But I'll do it! I'll do it. If my father was here, he definitely wouldn't choose to retreat!'

Saber of Red swung her silver sword, clustering her uplifted battle spirit—and advanced forward to attack the man who looked like Saber of Black.

And meanwhile, Rider of Black, most likely the only one on this battlefield who understood everything, desperately tried to hold back tears at the corners of his eyes. But he couldn't stop himself, and so he quietly wept.

That wasn't Saber of Black. Saber had definitely vanished back then.

Then who was that standing there? Who was that facing Saber of Red and gripping a sword in his hands?

It was obvious; he could only be one person. Rider of Black didn't know how such an astounding thing had happened, and he didn't care how either.

Rider simply regretted that 'he' hadn't chosen a peaceful life, and cried at the path of hardship 'he' had chosen instead. In life, Rider had never once lamented his own weakness. But right now, he lamented. His weakness, his words and deeds, his decisions had led 'him' astray here.

"—I'm sorry."

In truth, Rider of Black didn't have something that could be called a wish to make upon the Holy Grail. 'Maybe I should ask to be incarnated so that I can enjoy a second life'—that was all he thought of wishing for, at best. Therefore, if any of the other Black Servants had an extremely serious wish, he had thought he would happily turn the Grail over to them.

But now it was different. He had a wish he wanted to cling to even if he had to defeat the others. He wanted to save 'him'. He had wanted to save the boy who had desperately whispered [Help me] in a hoarse voice.

But he wasn't able to. A lonely sorrow painfully gripped Rider of Black.

With a calm attitude, Saber of Red took a step forward to attack. Saber of Black gripped his sword and chose to fight her. But his gaze lay on Rider of Black where he rested at Saber of Red's feet.

"—Are you okay?"

"…Idiot."

He seems well, Sieg, who had become Saber of Black, thought with relief. Now he just had to defeat Saber with this Saber's power.

"…Yo, fake Saber."

Saber of Red's snickered beneath her helmet. Sieg, even though he felt the same heavy pressure from her as before, realized that he wasn't afraid. In spite of being hit by a fighting spirit that even seemed to have its own mass, his mind didn't waver at all.

"It's true that I'm a fake just as you say. But this sword and this power are beyond a doubt the real thing. There is nothing insufficient for me to be your opponent. If anything is insufficient, it's only my spirit."

"Is that so? Then—how about I test it out!"

In an instant, Saber of Red closed the distance between them. With steps so nimble it was hard to believe considering her extremely heavy-built armor, she tried to slash Sieg diagonally from the shoulder down.

That wild yet precise and peerless attack was truly worthy of the name of a hero. So, if he could parry this attack, she would regard him as a Servant—Saber of Red swung her sword with such thoughts.

Sieg didn't parry it, nor evade or sidestep it. Amazingly, he took a step forward and blocked it by holding out his gauntlet.

Saber of Red widened her eyes in shock. What was that frighteningly strong toughness just now? Even a Servant's armor shouldn't be strong enough to remain uncut after receiving her slash.

No, her blade had cut through the gauntlet and reached his skin. But what she couldn't cut through wasn't the gauntlet, but the skin. Unbelievably, Saber of Black's skin was *tougher than steel*…!

Even Saber of Red, who had anticipated all his possible actions, needed a little time to recover from that shock. Even though her instincts warned her, her body couldn't react in that instant.

It was unfortunate that Saber of Black had to block the sword with one hand in order to create that opening in Saber's guard. Even if he used his full strength, a one-handed sword slash was slightly inferior in power compared to a two-handed slash.

Even so, the impact was enormous. As Saber of Red stumbled backwards in retreat, Saber of Black swung his blade in pursuit of her.

The ringing of blades resounded and blood danced through the air. Saber of Black was easily brandishing that huge sword. No, he wasn't simply swinging it with all his might. There was technique in his swings. The instant the two blade edges touched, his sword coiled around the other blade like a snake.

Saber of Red's sword was on the verge of being knocked away skywards. She immediately put strength into her hands holding the sword hilt and stopped it from happened. But her torso had once more become open—and Saber of Black didn't miss that opening.

His next attack was a fully-powered horizontal swing with both his hands gripping his sword.

With her full-body armor unable to absorb the impact, Saber of Red couldn't brace herself and was sent flying far away.

Even as she slid across the ground, Saber of Red somehow managed to fix her posture and stand back up. But she was hit by a sharp pain, and she pressed a hand to her abdomen while groaning.

"…Ah, damn it. He really is a Servant, that bastard."

Saber of Black's slash had been quite skillful and clever. It was an attack that hadn't simply relied on power like Berserker's had, but instead efficiently destroyed a person's body without any emotion at all. And the way he had flicked away her weapon as a lead up to his attack was also excellent.

In other words, he wasn't simply wearing the shell of Saber of Black. It was obvious that he had inherited even the hero's abundant accumulated battle experience.

The exceptional battle sense that Servants possessed—especially those of the most powerful Saber class—this homunculus did indeed possess it!

Suddenly the pain in her flank vanished—her Master had applied healing magecraft. It appeared he had gotten close enough on the battlefield to watch her battle. He was mostly like hiding somewhere on the battlefield. Though she had no idea how he could hide anywhere with that huge body of his.

'Hey, Master. Be careful, if you approach too close…'

'Well, I know, but I can react more quickly if I watch with my own eyes than if I rely on the danger sense from the Line that connects us… Well, I also honestly want to run away, though.'

He was leaking out idle complaints. Saber of Red imperiously stomped on the ground as if he were grumbling right beside her.

'Hey, Master. Do you have so little faith in me!?'

'I mean, after all, Saber of Black—is strong, you know?'

Shishigou smoothly spoke the harsh truth. Faced with that unhesitating answer, Saber of Red was more speechless than angry.

'By my rough assessment, he's almost even with you in terms of stats. To make it worse, he has some kind of troublesome special defensive-type Noble Phantasm or skill. In other words, he's better than you in terms of defence in a straight up match.'

Shishigou indifferently spoke the facts and the things he had gleamed from them.

'...Yeah, even though I cut through his gauntlet, his skin blocked my blade.'

That was abnormal. Something had clearly obstructed her blade. It couldn't be some spell by a Master. She was able to normally cut through his armor, so in other words, there must be some secret to that body of his.

'There are a lot of heroes throughout the world who are said to be immortal and invulnerable. But there aren't that many heroes who actually have immortal bodies. There should be a stipulation of [However, there is one exception] in all legends of immortality.'

'Heh… So, what's his weak point?'

'Well, you're going to have to do your best to find that out!'

'Shit, I knew it was going to be that way!'

'But let me give you a proposal, from a Master to his Servant. How about I strengthen you with a Command Spell for as long as you're fighting Saber of Black?'

Shishigou's proposal slightly deviated from the proper way to use a Command Spell. Normally, a Command Spell was used in a more narrowly defined way. For example, a spatial jump equivalent to sorcery, or an impossibly precise attack aimed at a single exact point. If not used in such precisely defined ways, the binding force of the Command Spell would weaken.

Using the Command Spell in the way Shishigou proposed would probably raise Saber's power to its max, but that was all. However—

'Wait, that's an excellent idea, Master. With that, my slashes will cut through him. I swear this upon the name of Saber.'

Saber of Red's instincts whispered to her. It wasn't that her slash just now didn't get any feedback or was obstructed by another power. The target was purely hard and sturdy. In that case, if she continuously used attacks that were stronger than the one just now, she was confident that she would cut through. If the back-up from the Command Spell was narrowed down to her battle with Saber of Black on this battlefield, it definitely wouldn't be a foolish plan.

'I see, then… I'll believe in you, Saber.'

I'll believe in you—just by hearing those words, the anger she had felt towards him earlier was completely blown away and an uplifting feeling swelled up in her chest. She was amazed at her own simplicity, but right now, it was pleasant.

'Yeah… yeah! Understood, Master.'

'I order my swordswoman with a Command Spell. Use all your power to defeat Saber of Black on this battlefield!'

An abundant amount of prana surged through the Line connecting them. It was taken into her body at its terminus, and flowed throughout her entire body through her Magic Circuits—

'That wish shall be granted! In the name of Saber of Red and of Mordred, I will definitely defeat Saber of Black!'

Instantly, Saber released and emitted her prana. Her appearance was just like that of a steam locomotive in human form. While fiercely emitting the steam known as prana, she readied her sword. She had no fear; there was only a pure and immaculate fighting spirit.

Words were unnecessary after that. There was no room for negotiation between the Servants of Black and Red. Sieg had made a choice and Saber of Red had responded to it.

"—Here I come, Saber of Black."

In response to the silver Saber's words, the gold Saber replied.

"—Come, Saber of Rot."

There was no doubt or hesitation. Fear was overcome and killing intent was respectively reacted to. Reward was unnecessary and praise was needless. Each simply following their own choices, they gripped their respective swords with both hands—and began running at each other.

A bullet charge accomplished through the skill [Prana Burst]. With even more power added to it due to a Command Spell, Saber of Red's attack was truly as fast as a comet dashing across the earth. Sieg—Saber of Black understood that he couldn't win with speed after getting a late start, and he moved to meet her attack.

The bullet and guillotine collided head on. Petals of flames colored over the two of them. A thunderous roar rang through the battlefield with every clash within the maddeningly chaotic hurricane of weapons.

"Hah. Your slashes are pathetic, Saber of Black…!"

"Kuh—!!"

And then their swords clashed for the thirteenth time in this exchange. The two swords entangled with each other and they proceeded to a contest of pure physical strength. As such, naturally—Saber of Red, with both her Prana Burst and the boost from a Command Spell, was stronger.

"OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOH!"

Howling, Saber of Red forcibly pushed back Saber of Black. The distance them widened—and Saber of Red thrust her sword out with a fearless smile.

"And you call yourself 'Saber', one who ought to be the greatest amongst all Servants? What a disappointment. Or perhaps this is as far as a forgery can go?"

Remaining silent, Saber of Black stood back up. The damage he had received… wasn't much, Saber of Red judged. As expected, his sturdiness wasn't normal. She had to absolutely kill him here—Saber of Red hardened her resolve to do that.

"—O sword, let thee fill."

Saber of Black began the steps to unleash his sword. Orange light like a twilight-colored aurora borealis came out from the sword and began to dazzlingly illuminate his face.

He had activated the ace in the hole that all Servants had—his Noble Phantasm.

"So you're releasing your Noble Phantasm… Hah, that's fine with me!"

'Go ahead, Saber. Show me your trump card Noble Phantasm!'

Not even voicing any disapproval, her Master gave his permission for her to use it.

"—Well then, seeing as my Master has given me permission, allow me to respond in kind with my own Noble Phantasm!"

At the same time as Saber of Red readied her sword, her helmet's function as a Noble Phantasm was deactivated and it was stored away within her armor. It was said that the King of Knights from Britain, Arthur Pendragon, hadn't aged during his kingship…and had remained the same fair-looking boy as he'd been when he pulled out the sword.

Then it was only natural that his child, Mordred—also had the appearance of a delicate and even lovely-looking girl.

However, her girlish outward appearance couldn't completely hide her Berserker-like brutal personality. Her green eyes brimmed with intoxication with violence.

At the same time as she removed her helmet, her sword also underwent a transformation. The silver blade became dyed crimson, and its form began to distort. As violent and furious sounds rang out from it, red lightning flickered through the sword's surroundings.

This phenomenon wasn't this sword's original nature. The proof of kingship that King Arthur had obtained and kept stored away, **Radiant Sword of the King**[Clarent]—the sword that Mordred had stolen and used to deal a fatal wound to King Arthur.

Its transformation into an evil sword was due to that episode in her legend. When Mordred held this sword, the sword of the king transformed into an evil sword of hatred.

"It is time for your execution. Come, meet an end worthy of an imitation, Saber of Black—!"

The overwhelming vortex of prana trampled the surrounding wreckage on the battlefield and rejected anything that lived. It became like this just by having the two of them start to prepare the release of their Noble Phantasms.

"…Here I come."

Saber of Black merely muttered that quietly.

Two heroes, who had come from the Age of Gods to the present day, who should never have crossed paths. At last, they revealed their 'certain-kill attacks'.

Clarent Blood Arthur
"**Rebellion Against My Beautiful Father**!!"

Saber of Red howled in rage.

Balmung
"**Phantasmal Greatsword、Felling of the Sky Demon**!!"

Saber of Black roared.

The orange light rose like a tide, and the red lightning plunged forward. The shining lights clashed and caused frighteningly strong raging winds with ground zero at its center.

It was like a high-pressure curling tornado. It engulfed the surroundings and simply continued destroying everything in its path. Not even a single piece of rubble was left behind.

—And also. In the clash between Noble Phantasms, Saber of Red was slightly superior.

Between Saber of Black's Noble Phantasm, which destroyed the entire surrounding area in a wave, and Saber of Red's Noble Phantasm, which destroyed all existing material in its path in a straight line, Saber of Red's Noble Phantasm had the advantage in terms of their respective natures.

Saber of Black fell down to one knee—and Saber of Red went into a fit of rage.

"Why are you still alive…!?"

Yes. To Saber of Red, the fact that he was still alive in the first place was in itself a problem.

To Mordred, Clarent was a weapon that possessed curse-like glory. She wouldn't permit herself to be defeated by anyone except her father, and even more, she wouldn't allow for this sword, which had delivered a fatal blow to her father, to fail to finish killing anyone.

"Do not dare move, Saber of Black. I, and nobody else, will be the one to kill you…!"

But there was another big reason that made it worth killing Saber of Black here and now.

When their Noble Phantasms clashed, Saber of Red had noticed it. Saber of Black still wasn't in his normal condition at full power. In the first place, he had become a Servant through a ridiculous miracle by transforming with a Command Spell.

Indeed, his power was definitely equal to that of Saber of Blacks, and he certainly had all of his battle experience as well.

But, it still didn't reach his mind and spirit. He was *disconcerted* by the act of swinging a sword. As a result, she was able to stay one step above him in everything during this battle—this time, that is.

And also, without a doubt, this was the homunculus' first battle with the body of Saber of Black.

Her instincts whispered to her. She had to defeat him in this first battle while he was still inexperienced. She had to cut off his head now while the transformation had come undone.

Most likely, his resolve would be even greater when he next transformed and he would be strong enough to match her. Then, if he transformed a third time—

If she was to grasp victory, she had to completely eliminate that 'next' chance!

I have to cut off his head and stab my sword through his heart by any means possible, or else— obeying her instincts, Saber of Red took a step forward.

***

Assassin of Red's Fortress Noble Phantasm, **Hanging Gardens of Babylon**. Though on the battlefield, this fortress was the only place ruled by silence and calm.

"—Now then, Master. Was *that* part of your calculations?"

She smiled nastily. Shirou Kotomine gazed down at the phenomenon that had just occurred with an unusually grim expression.

"Unbelievable! Saber of Black has revived! Goodness gracious, it's a great miracle worthy of a saint! Truly, [Hang up Magic]!"

In response to Caster of Red's mutterings, Shirou shook his head silently.

"No, it isn't a revival… If I had to describe it, that is closer to a possession."

"A possession?"

"…Among Servants, there are also those who can cause strong effects on the bodies of their Master. Normally, the relationship between Master and Servant is the same as between owner and familiar, but there are those who possess skills that make it possible to share bodies. In those

cases, the Master nearly becomes an existence close to immortal. Of course, only for the duration of the Holy Grail War… And most importantly, it doesn't mean that their battle power increases, so the only Servant they'd be able to fight is Assassin."

"Wait. No matter how I look at it, that there is different. He isn't a Master, and definitely isn't a Servant."

"Yes. That's why it's a possession. Most likely, he's summoning Saber of Black with the abundant prana of a Command Spell. Of course, normally it would be impossible even with a Command Spell, but—"

Saber of Black and Saber of Red were fiercely clashing against each other. It was an impossible battle even in myth between the 'Dragonslayer Siegfried' and Saber of Red.

"That homunculus alone is an exception. He has something connected to Saber of Black within his body. I don't know if it's a part of Saber's body or a holy relic of his. In any case, by using that as an intermediary, he's making Saber descend from the Throne into his own flesh."

"Impossible… We're not such low-class evil spirits. We're Heroic Spirits, you know? The purity, density, strength, solidity and every other aspect of our souls are completely different. Something like possessing someone's physical body and giving them a Heroic Spirit's abilities is impossible."

Assassin of Red was correct. If Shirou's words were right, then that was a 'shell'. A being who wore the body of Saber of Black. But that was impossible. The physical abilities, magical abilities and, of course, the soul of Saber of Black—no, of any being that was called a Heroic Spirit was incomparable to that of a human's.

"If a body is possessed by a Heroic Spirit, a human's soul wouldn't be able to endure it. To say nothing of the soul of a homunculus like him."

"It's precisely because he is a homunculus. Their souls are very young and therefore pure, and as such they won't be dyed by anything, and their bodies can endure any kind of transformation as well."

In the first place, a homunculus was a 'molded' entity using Magic Circuits as the foundation. Since they had no accumulated experience like humans did, their souls were pure and sturdy like an infant's. A human who had lived twenty years would have twenty years' worth of accumulated experience, and that experience would sometimes produce magnificent strength under critical duress.

But, when you possessed another person's body, that accumulated experience became jammed and obstructed as if by white blood cells. Because that other person's accumulated years of experience and your own accumulated years of experience weren't compatible at all.

However, the homunculus was different. He had no such accumulated experience. He was merely a being created in an already-matured state. Therefore, there was no rejection when he was being possessed.

"…Though, being possessed by a Heroic Spirit for even one second is equivalent to a miracle. Even with the assistance of a Command Spell, he should only be able to maintain it for a few minutes."

"In other words, you mean this? —That thing is something that we can ignore."

Shirou nodded. Certainly, Saber of Black's revival was astounding. But it was another matter if it was limited by time and number of uses. Even if he still had the maximum number of Command Spells left, he still had only two remaining. He was basically worthless. He probably wasn't accustomed to battle itself either, so it was hard to say that he perfectly displayed Saber of Black's true specs.

And yet. That homunculus' existence—is awfully irritating to me.

All those gathered on this battlefield were chess pieces to Shirou. Whether it was those facing him as enemies, those who were his allies, or even himself, everyone was a piece on the board.

But he alone was clearly different. An unintended piece had suddenly revived and struck the board. Perhaps the growing irritation in his chest was due to that. Or perhaps—

"…How foolish. Even if he'd have an ephemerally short lifespan, it'd be far better to try and be a perfect existence."

Shirou's whisper didn't seem to reach anyone's ears. Assassin of Red questioned Shirou.

"Well, if that's the case, he's not a problem then. More importantly, Shirou, if you don't hurry up and get to work soon, you won't make it in time, you know? Ruler has also come to this battlefield. Right now all her energy is devoted to dealing with Berserker, but if she manages to reach these gardens, it'll be the end of the line for you."

"Yes, I've already received permission from them… All that's left is the transfer ritual with the agreement of both parties. It's an easy procedure… I have to conduct the transfer, so I will need a bit of time, though."

"Hmm, if I obstruct her with those three, I'll be able to buy some time."

"Good luck then"—Leaving behind those words with a refreshing smile, Shirou departed. The only ones remaining there were the two Servants who respected him as their Master.

"By the way, Caster. Since we have the fortune of being alone together, there's one thing I'd like to ask you."

"Ah, I also happen to have something I need to ask. Please, do go ahead first, revered empress."

"—What are you scheming?"

While smiling sweetly, Assassin of Red struck to the heart of the matter with cruel and ruthless emotion in her eyes. They were similar to the eyes of a snake ascertaining its prey.

And Caster of Red, who saw those eyes and, let alone breaking out in a cold sweat, merely tilted his head curiously in response, also possessed no ordinary nerves. Even if he didn't have any weapons or magecraft, he had a well-functioning tongue.

"Nothing really. Just as I have stated, I only pursue our Master's… Shirou Kotomine's fleeting and majestic dream."

"Hah. So you're that kind of character, storyteller. Indeed, his dream is as fragile as glasswork and also very long. The journey to it is obstructed by many hardships, and even if he can overcome them, it's still uncertain whether or nor his wish will be granted. But—if our Master should brush aside all those hardships and even reach 'that'…"

—It could only be called a miracle. The dream that Shirou told to Assassin of Red was something any ordinary person would laugh off as ridiculous, something that only abnormal people could seriously talk about.

"…Your role will cease to exist in this world."

"Not just mine, but yours as well—no, the same goes for all Heroic Spirits!"

Assassin of Red smiled faintly at those words.

"I am different. I'll still have a proper role. If not, even I wouldn't follow Shirou's plan."

"Ah, I see. So that's what you mean! Hmm, it's true that, if Shirou's dream is realized, even the need to spin tales will disappear from this world. But—the story to reach it shall be a masterpiece. An unprecedented, first and last masterpiece that would be unreachable even if you gave an infinite number of typewriters to an infinite number of monkeys! If I can write it down, well, I shall not have any regrets left."

"…You make some sense."

Still, Assassin of Red didn't lose her suspicious expression. Honestly speaking, her doubts about him had started when he released Berserker of Red.

If Shirou's plan advanced well, this man may carelessly produce hardships himself.

"Ah, that. In that case, have no worries!"

"...What should I have no worries about?"

Spreading both his arms in an exaggerated manner, Caster of Red spoke as if singing.

"Our Master is already [against death and all oblivious enmity], and is trying to win against them! There's no way that *no one will interfere* with such an extraordinary plan! Even without me planning any underhanded tricks, every single person will come to obstruct him! However! However, I have faith that our Master will surely overcome even them!"

Watching Caster of Red excitedly talk on and on, Assassin of Red finally let go of her vigilance towards him.

"—I see. If you put it like that, I can understand your attitude. Caster, you think obstacles will appear? What kind of obstacle specifically?"

"You already know what. Right now, it's that girl who's bewildered due to ignorance."

"…Ruler, huh? Certainly, her privilege is astounding. But we're conducting a counter-measure against that right now, aren't we?"

"No, no. Her privilege is also marvelous, but what should be truly feared is the girl herself."

"What, do you know who she is?"

"There are not many Heroic Spirits that are female saints who hoist a flag… She is my motherland's beloved enemy. The country girl who was destroyed due to obeying the voice of god and went mad with grief—Jeanne d'Arc."

"Hoh. So she's the bitter enemy of your country."

Assassin of Red said that with a smile. Just as she said, Jeanne d'Arc had risen up as the savior of France and completely defeated the English army. Though she was arrested in the end due to treachery, their hatred towards her was probably very deep. Many works written in England at that time depicted her as an enemy and denounced her.

"No, no, I no longer harbor any such ill feelings. Actually, is not our own Master a saint from the Far East? Things such as England and France no longer matter. However—if she's going to obstruct us, we shall have to crush her without any mercy."

"…By your hands?"

"Me? *Perish the thought.* I shall leave that to you, revered empress."

Caster of Red laughed loudly, and Assassin of Red, though she'd already known it would be that way, sighed.

"…So? What was it that you wanted to ask?"

"It's about none other than our Master. I naturally know that 'Shirou' is his real name. But where did the name 'Kotomine' come from? There is no way he simply adopted it because it was suitable."

"Ah, that. Kotomine is apparently the name of his adoptive father. Needless to say, that man is without a single relative in this word. So apparently he relied on the supervisor who had survived along with him, a priest name Kotomine, and received a certain social status from him."

"Haha, I see. So the reason he became the supervisor of the Great Holy Grail War was also thanks to those connections."

"So it seems. Though, that priest has already been dead a long time now, and Shirou apparently doesn't interact much with the man who he's step-brothers with… What's with those eyes and that smile you're making?"

"No, no, I just thought that our Master trusts you a lot. When I asked him about it, he just vaguely dodged the question."

"…Isn't it probably because you haven't made yourself trustworthy?"

When Shirou had carelessly talked to Caster of Red about his origins, Caster couldn't help seeming as if he were about to spill over and fall from the gossip. Moreover, it was quite possible that he'd publish it as biography.

"Hmph. I am not so much of a fiend that I'd expose people's privacy, but—whoa there."

An impact ran through the ground beneath them from the bottom of the gardens. The whole gardens trembled violently as if affected by an earthquake.

"…That was?"

"The aftershock of Berserker's attack, probably. It seems he's about to reach his critical point."

Assassin of Red ordered the Hanging Gardens to ascend higher in the air. It would be troubling if these gardens were targeted by that [weapon]. He should be targeting not these gardens, but the Fortress of Millennia.

"However—won't the Holy Grail break as a result?"

"Have no fear. The Greater Grail is underground beneath the fortress, and it's not something that can be turned into rubble anyway. Even if Berserker goes to attack it directly, there's no problem. And he no longer has such intelligence left in him in any case."

Using remote-viewing thaumaturgy, Assassin of Red confirmed that Ruler was fighting Berserker of Red.

"Now then… How does Ruler intend to face Berserker? If she gets hit by his final attack, even she won't be able to walk away unscathed."

Just as Assassin of Red said, the champion of rebellion, Spartacus, was about to swing his final blow. He was targeting the Fortress of Millennia where the oppressors were gathered. The mad warrior didn't even consider that his own Master was there.

When his body started to collapse due to its own weight as it swelled up with prana, Berserker at last reached enough power for that final and most powerful attack. It was the attack of the end and demise on this battlefield.

—Here it comes.

Ruler was certain of it. The next attack would be the most powerful attack that Berserker of Red could unleash. At the same time, it would be his final attack. He was going to use up even the prana needed to tie himself to the present age and disappear as a result.

If that was the path that the Heroic Spirit Spartacus chose, then she wouldn't stop him.

But, as expected, she had to avoid getting swallowed up in it herself.

She glanced at the Hanging Garden, which existed as if to sneer at her. Next, her gaze turned to where the Sabers of Black and Red were fiercely battling each other.

She decided. She made a decision not according to a revelation from God, but according to her own will.

While holding her flag in one hand, she took a huge jump backwards—and once having confirmed that Berserker's gaze had turned to look at the fortress, she headed towards the two Sabers.

For the time being, she intended to get their attention and convince them to withdraw. The other Servants had already noticed Berserker of Red's abnormal state and had retreated somewhere safe.

Only Sieg, who had transformed into Saber of Black, Rider of Black and Saber of Red were still within range of Berserker's attack.

—Not good!

Saber of Red and Saber of Black had, of all things, unleashed their respective Noble Phantasms against each other. The aftershocks of that tremendous energy naturally reached Ruler, but it also reached Berserker of Red further away as well.

Having broken through his critical point, Berserker of Red howled. The countdown reached zero, and the ground shook.

Ruler shouted.

"Run away!"

Just as she was about to deal the finishing blow to Sieg, Saber of Red turned around in shock and caught sight of Berserker right as he was on the verge of exploding. Though she hesitated slightly, she seemed to receive an order from her Master and clicked her tongue, immediately turning into spiritual form.

It went without saying for Ruler, who was in fact possessing the human Laeticia, but Sieg couldn't turn into spiritual form and run away either.

"Sieg-kun!"

Hearing Ruler's desperate call, the now-empty Sieg silently shook his head. It appeared he couldn't move due to the pain and damage from being hit by Saber of Red's Noble Phantasm attack earlier and also the backlash from his transformation.

"…Go. You aren't a Servant who should perish here."

And yet, he unhesitatingly told Ruler to run away alone. Ruler sighed in exasperation.

"Don't say stupid things… The one who brought you here was me."

"I chose to fight by my own will."

"Guh. There's a limit even to being stubborn!"

"…Isn't that basically the pot calling the kettle black?"

Despite being in this kind of situation, Sieg spoke to Ruler with cool eyes.

"—Do not worry. I don't intend to let you die. And I'm not going to perish here either."

She planted the flag in her right hand into the ground. Peeking at the state of affairs behind her back, she saw Rider of Black, who looked totally exhausted, tightly hugging Sieg as if to protect him.

She didn't think his Master wouldn't let him turn into spiritual form and run away. Most likely, Rider himself had refused to do so. Since he possessed the [Independent Action] skill, Rider could continue to survive for a short time even if his prana supply was cut off.

…However, not running away in this situation was just reckless.

"Are you not going to escape, Rider of Black?"

"I don't want to."

"But—"

Rider shook his head fervently while hugging Sieg.

"I said I don't want to! I don't want to see him get wounded any further! I absolutely won't move away from here!"

Despite his own substantial wounds, Rider didn't even consider running away. It wasn't that there was something he could do; he was just going to perish with the two of them because he was trying to protect Sieg.

It was meaningless. A completely meaningless act.

If his Noble Phantasms weren't taken into account, Rider of Black, Astolfo, was a Heroic Spirit that was only somewhere between second and third rate in terms of strength and skill. Astolfo was the only one among Twelve Paladins of Charlemagne who was famed to be [weak] according to legend.

But even so, Astolfo was a hero.

"I don't want to…"

Even though he trembled, Rider didn't stop protecting Sieg. He didn't falter either. It was only natural for those who were born strong to display courage. Because they were strong. They had pride in their strength, and they had a will that wouldn't yield to any enemy.

Astolfo was different. This Servant was weak and could never defeat the enemy known as fate. His strength could neither move mountains nor pierce the heavens. And yet, Astolfo was a brave hero acknowledged by everyone during his lifetime. Even if he was weak, even if his power was insufficient, even if he was defeated. Astolfo was a brave person and had the qualifications to be a hero.

"—I understand. Then please stay still there. It will be dangerous if you move."

If that was this Servant's will, Ruler had no right to stop him.

That's why this was to protect Sieg. She might be slightly deviating from her role as a mediator. But she had been given to discretion to act according to her judgement on the battlefield.

The Servant who was like neither a beast, human, monster or even a Heroic Spirit, but rather a giant 'wrathful god', at last struck the ground with his final attack.

Berserker of Red was filled with euphoria that numbed his brain. His final attack would destroy all tyranny and smash all authority.

Of course, he was mad… and even he understood that he was mad. But he wouldn't stop. He was born with this personality that couldn't endure obeying anyone.

No, that wasn't it. Being scorned and wounded felt good to him. Making the stagnating things inside him settle like sediments was an irresistible joy to him.

So he continued smiling. And when it reached its critical point, Spartacus rebelled. As long as there were oppressors in the world, neither his joy nor his anger could be stopped.

And now, after having been given a second life, he was trying to throw the most powerful blow of his life. His vision distorted and the pain of having his entire body rearranged by something tortured his mind. But that was also at an end. This wasn't simply an attack loaded with all his power. It was what could appropriately be called the ultimate destruction that he couldn't achieve unless sacrificed all of himself.

"—Ah."

He even let out a sigh of wonder. He didn't even reflect on how much his flesh had been hideously transformed. The gladiator of suffering who had devoted his entire lifetime to rebellion finally swung that final blow.

His target was the oppressor with the greatest authority in the Great Holy Grail War: Ruler. And also those in the Fortress of Millennia behind her. An attack that seemed to reach the moon and make the stars fall. The greatest counter punch he had ever made in his lifetime including both before and after his death. Would his fist, his sword really reach those oppressors?

He neither knew nor cared to find out. The austere gladiator, who had only devoted his life to rebellion, breathed his last breath while smiling.

Ruler, Rider of Black and Sieg were in the direct path of that attack. Avoiding it was impossible, and no matter how tough a shield one possessed, it couldn't protect against that attack that Berserker had wagered his life upon.

But—the one receiving that attack was the absolute mediator of the Holy Grail War, Ruler.

Luminosité
"**God is Here—**"

She tightly grasped her flag with both hands and activated its true name.

The flag that the saint Jeanne d'Arc had kept in place of a sword. That flag, which inspired and uplifted the soldiers who followed her believing that a saint walked amongst them, was said to have continued to protect this female saint who always ran ahead as the vanguard.

Eternelle
"**—With Me**!"

And when this holy flag was activated as a Noble Phantasm, it converted Jeanne's EX rank Magic Resistance into a protection against all physical and spiritual harm.

Berserker of Red's attack had been unleashed with all his hate and joy. But the flag completely cut off not only Jeanne, but also Rider of Black and Sieg behind her from it.

She put strength into both her hands. Right now, Ruler's flag was their only lifeline. Stifling her anguish and simply looking forward—Ruler simply endured the explosive maelstrom of light.

It was like someone who opposed all the evil in the world.

It was like someone who opposed a fallen star.

It was like all humans who, despite being so small, opposed the *thing* before their eyes that they didn't consider right.

Filled with pride, willpower, anger or perhaps something else entirely, humans possessed hearts that could rise up with courage that surpassed their fear even in the face of overwhelming violence that slaughtered thousands of people.

Watching her small back, Sieg was gripped by a heartbreakingly sad feeling for some reason. He was fully aware that it was arrogant of him, but when he thought of the tragic tale of her life, he couldn't discard those feelings.

She had everything taken from her due to betrayal. Receiving the worst treatment conceivably possible for a human, and yet never cursing anything… the personification of a saint who never despaired.

It would be fine if she cursed those who betrayed. He could understand if she hated them. But she had felt no hatred, resentment, or even regrets. For some strange reason, Sieg couldn't stand that.

…Rider of Black suddenly recalled the myth of an old man who managed to cut the sea in half. The light that completely isolated and cut them off from their surroundings was like that divided water. Just as life had an end, this attack that Berserker had wagered his life on also came to an end. Berserker of Red's fully-powered attack had half-destroyed the Fortress of Millennia, and killed the many golems, homunculi and Dragon Tooth Warriors that remained on the battlefield.

But even with that stupendous destructive power, the three of them didn't receive a single injury. When the light settled down, Ruler sighed with relief and turned around. With a brilliant and shining smile, she let out another sigh of relief and—

"…Thank goodness you're unhurt."

She murmured that.

It was closer to a calamity than a sword slash. It was also like an earthquake and tsunami filled with malice. Having converted Berserker's entire enormous store of prana into pure destruction, it shook the earth and mowed down the Fortress of Millennia.

Shrieks rose up around the magi. Fortunately, the location where they were watching the battle situation from was not directly exposed to the roaring flames. But everything just a few meters ahead of them was in a miserable state.

"W-What… what happened just now…?"

Gordes' mutter as if he were seeing a nightmare was only natural. If they had been directly hit by the attack, it would be understandable. But they had only been hit by the aftershocks.

"…What's the condition of Berserker of Red?"

In response to Fiore's question, Caules sighed and spoke up.

"He's vanished… What about the other Servants?"

"Archer is still alive. How about Rider?"

Celenike nodded in an annoyed manner. Despite how much she had told him to turn into spiritual form and come back here, he had, let alone come back, tried to protect that homunculus. Considering the situation, it might be time to finally settle things decisively with him.

"Rider is also alive. Caster?"

Roche had received a terrible shock over how the golems he and Caster had worked hard to make had been scattered into pieces like wood chips. But he confirmed that the one he was concerned about the most, Caster, was still alive.

"Master is safe and sound… 80% of the golems were blow away, and the ones that were kept on standby at the fortress are barely able to operate."

"I see. All that's left is Lancer. It seems grandfather is also alive, but…"

"My lord is also fine. His battle with Lancer of Red ended while unsettled. He's terribly angry. More importantly, there is an emergency situation."

Standing on the broken window frame, Darnic said that with a somehow hoarse voice.

"…Emergency… situation?"

Fiore thought that there couldn't be any emergency situation worse than what they went through just now, but Darnic's voice was more serious than she expected.

"—The Hanging Gardens have started to approach the fortress."

Saber of Red canceled her spiritual form and examined the state of her surroundings.

—In the forest that spread out on either side of the grassland plains, many trees had fallen. They were in a wretched state that made it looked as if they had been trampled by a giant.

—Nearly all the golems, homunculi and Dragon Tooth Warriors had died. That was only natural. That much prana had been concentrated and released all at once. The only ones still alive were those homunculi who had been on standby back in the rear lines or who had sensed the situation and run away.

—The Servants had all escaped from the battlefield at high speed. At the very least, anyone who was thick-headed enough to get swallowed up by this attack was worse than third-rate.

In other words, the land was completely empty. That strange monstrous Servant had annihilated this battlefield. Whether she was angry, amazed or sneering… not knowing what her currently feelings should be described as, Saber simply stood there in a dumfounded daze for a little while.

"Hey, Saber."

"…Ah, Master. The situation is just as you can see."

Turning around at the voice that called out to her from behind her back, she shrugged her shoulders. Her Master Shishigou also let out a sigh of amazement as he looked at the battlefield.

"So, what should we do now, Master? Please give me orders."

"Even if you say that… a battle with enemies and allies jumbled together on completely empty land like this will definitely turn out awful."

"So shall we withdraw?"

Shishigou was about to agree with those words, but he suddenly looked up to the sky and decided to reject that proposal.

"—No, we won't be withdrawing. Look, Saber."

Shishigou pointed at the Hanging Gardens, a product of the Age of Gods. Shishigou, having carefully investigated information about Semiramis, could tell that it was Assassin of Red's Noble Phantasm.

The problem was that the Hanging Gardens were approaching the crumbled Fortress of Millennia.

"…Hmph. Certainly, if we withdraw now, we'll be treated as outsiders."

"Right? Let's go, Saber."

"Understood, Master. So, is flying your speciality?"

"I'm terrible at it. I don't want to think about it that much, but it seems I'll have to rely on you."

In response to Shishigou's grumbles, Saber of Red chuckled. Yes, in other words, it was time for her to use her personal skill, [Prana Burst].

***

"…Hmm. I thought that destroying that fortress would be slightly difficulty, but we were saved the trouble. I thought we would have to use Lancer's Noble Phantasm as well, but…"

Assassin of Red said that and gazed at her fellow Red Servants who had retreated from the battlefield to the Hanging Gardens.

"Thank you very much for all your efforts, everyone. I can see that your boiling blood is still unsatisfied—but just endure it for a little while longer. The battle will resume very soon."

Archer of Red shook her head at Assassin's words.

"I don't mind—but what do you intend to do by having us approach the fortress like this? Do you want to go kill the Masters directly?"

"It goes without saying. —We're going to take back the Greater Grail."

Instantly, all the other Servants there fell silent. Rider and Archer exchanged glances and even Lancer looked at Assassin with a doubtful expression.

"'Take it back'? No, in the first place… how are we going to do such a thing?'

Assassin of Red pointed at the floor beneath them with a smile.

"—What allows these Hanging Gardens to float is the concept of [inversion]. Plants grow downward and water flows from downstream to upstream here."

The gardens came to a halt in the skies above the Fortress of Millennia. If any citizens in Trifas were to look up at the night sky, what would they think of these giant gardens that hid even the moon from sight? At the very least, they wouldn't believe their eyes if they were sober.

"Gaze well upon it, you tiny magi. *This is the true territory of a magus*."

Assassin of Red laughed loudly and spread her arms wide as she released a certain spell.

Roaring wind blew out from the bottom of the gardens. Similar to a tornado, it connected to the fortress below like some kind of pipe.

"Hey, hey… You mean you really intend to steal it!?"

At Rider of Red's words, Assassin of Red nodded and shouted.

"Of course! Because these gardens were designed for the sake of that! Now, come out, Greater Grail! Show us you terrible and beautiful figure that was constructed with god-like magecraft!"

The ground crumbled and was sucked up. The fortress had already been destroyed by more than two thirds. The naked bedrock was smashed up and then, at last, the Greater Grail was exposed to the surface's air.

"That—is the Holy Grail?"

Archer of Red muttered with a dumbfounded expression. With her eyesight that was as good as the eyes of a falcon, she was certainly able to see the Greater Grail below. But that wasn't what had truly shocked her.

It wasn't just Archer; Lancer, Rider and even Caster could only stand there dumbfounded. The absolute, eternal and colorless abundant prana that had accumulated continuously for more than six decades swirled around in a vortex.

"That is the Holy Grail…! Excellent! That is *far too excellent*! Magnificent! Magnificent, magnificent!! Even I can sense that overwhelming prana from here! I even want to jump in and drown within it, become one with it! And yet, it is hideous like a naked human body! Truly, [fair is foul and foul is fair]!"

Caster raised cries of joy.

It was obvious that it was worthy to be called an [almighty wish-granting device], as long as the wish asked of it wasn't too great. It was only natural that even Servants like them would become excited.

"…Tch, it's completely bonded to the ley lines. It seems it will take time to tear it out. However, we don't have the leisure to remain at ease. They're coming, everyone."

Even without Assassin of Red saying it, all the Servants there sensed it. In order to prevent the plundering of the Greater Grail, the Black Servants were heading there one by one.

"I have to focus on the Greater Grail for a while. I'll leave the enemies to you all. If you don't hold them back here, your wishes will vanish like dew in the morning. Deal with them carefully, understood?"

In response to those words accompanied by a jeering smile, Rider and Archer of Red retorted without hiding their hostility.

"—That goes without saying. I should be saying that to you instead. Make sure not to fail."

"I'll do what we have to do. Don't bother with meticulous instructions like that. You don't need to tell us."

But even in the face of that unabashed hostility, Assassin of Red's composure didn't collapse.

"Well then, as for me, I'm gushing with inspiration thanks to the Greater Grail, so I'll take my leave here!"

"…You should help at least a little."

Ignoring everyone else's amazed and disgusted expressions, Caster hastily headed towards the workshop make for his personal use—in other worse, his 'study'.

"Ah, that reminds. There's one thing I forgot to say. These gardens *aren't within Romania*. You should fight while bearing that in mind."

Assassin of Red left those final words and disappeared. The Greater Grail was moving at a constant dull speed, but it was definitely being torn out from Trifas.

Since the Gardens had approached right beside the fortress, the Black Servants were able to reach this place with a single leap.

"—I'll take Lancer of Black."

The red spearman murmured that and readied his divine spear. Rider of Red naturally chose his teacher, Archer of Black, and Archer of Red decided to aim for Caster, who she was meeting for the first time.

The offensive and defensive sides had switched. The Black Servants had to take back the Greater Grail before it was stolen. The Red Servants has to protect the Greater Grail until it was completely taken away.

The situation had also reversed along with the offence and defence. The Fortress of Millennia, which should have been an impenetrable stronghold, was now useless rubbish, and the Red faction were the ones with the overwhelming advantage.

But there was one thing that would become problem in this current situation. That was the existence of Ruler, who already was in the midst of heading here. But the only ones who knew that were Assassin and Caster of Red along with their Master Shirou.

The Black faction, Red faction and Ruler all understood that this was a battle against time. In the several minutes it would take for the Greater Grail to be torn out from the ley lines and completely installed inside the Hanging Gardens, they had to fight a desperate battle to the death.

***

Ruler had left behind Rider of Black and Sieg and was now running towards the Hanging Gardens by herself at full speed. The closer she got, the more shocked she was by that floating Noble Phantasm. Anti-Fortress Noble Phantasms, which possessed the pure power to destroy fortresses and castles, were rare, but that didn't mean that there weren't Heroic Spirit who owned them. However, Noble Phantasms that were fortresses in and of themselves were most likely even more considerably few in number.

Fortresses that existed as Noble Phantasms, according to the knowledge that Ruler immediately dragged out, were limited to those like the one possessed by Ireland's Child of Light. And even that was restricted to the borders of his homeland.

Furthermore, the number of Noble Phantasms that were floating strongholds was nearly zero. And to make things more troublesome, it appeared that the owner of that floating fortress held ill will towards her. She had gone through considerable detours, but in any case, there were many things she needed to verify with the Red faction.

—However.

Something, something fatal was starting and about to end. She kept having that premonition. Somehow managing to shake off the chill that took hold of her, she jumped onto the walls of the Fortress of Millennia and ran upwards at full speed.

From the huge hole that had been bored into the Fortress of Millennia, the Greater Grail was slowly coming into view.

"…I can't believe it."

Ruler's murmur was only natural. The oppressive sensation clamping down on her entire body told her that it was without a doubt the real Greater Grail. What she couldn't believe was that the Red faction was trying to drag it out.

It was true that this was a war that revolved around the Greater Grail. She also predicted that the Red Faction would end up doing this if they won. But that would normally only happen after the war was over. Why were they hurriedly trying to recover the Greater Grail when the scales of battle were still swaying?

Most likely, the one causing problems right now was not any of the Red Servants, but a Master. Someone who, at the very least, wasn't following the will of the Association of Magi…

After having conjectured that far, she finally managed to arrive atop the floating fortress. Water ran upstream and plants clearly grew not upwards but downwards instead.

"A reversed flow… the Hanging Gardens…!"

"That's right, Ruler."

Hearing that jeering voice, Ruler turned around—she knew of only two Heroic Spirits who possessed the Hanging Gardens as a Noble Phantasm. The first was Nebuchadnezzar II, and the second was—the legendary empress who, due to oral transmission of ancient folklore getting mixed up, was lavished with the falsehood of having 'made the Hanging Gardens'.

The world's oldest poisoner—Semiramis.

"Assassin of Red… so that's who you are."

"Indeed. Now then, Ruler. Do you have some business in my gardens? I don't believe I have violated any particular rules, though."

Perhaps due to the dimness of the nearby torches, her black and glamorous dress was halfway merged with the darkness of the night. Ruler felt it was terribly—eerie.

"No, you have."

"Hoh," said Assassin of Red, displaying interest.

"—Then tell me. What rule have I violated?"

"If you have not a single smidgeon of guilt on your conscious and you are obeying the rules of the Holy Grail War as you say—then please let me meet your Master."

Instantly, the look in Assassin of Red's eyes switched from sneering to cautious. Ruler knew from those eyes that the path she had followed here wasn't mistaken.

"…Unfortunately, my Master is occupied right now. Furthermore, while he isn't a coward at all, I won't let him meet with other Servants."

"I see. *He's hiding somewhere within these gardens*, isn't he?'

Ruler easily pointed that out. Assassin of Red was already preparing to fight. As if to stop her from doing so, Ruler stuck forward her flag and spoke.

"You should understand that fighting me is useless, Assassin of Red. The pillars of light shot from the Hanging Gardens were the work of your spells, correct? In that case—"

"Hmph. It's true that my magecraft can't pierce through your Magic Resistance. Is that one of your privileges as Ruler, I wonder?"

"I have still more privileges… Assassin of Red. Please don't make me use this."

Ruler's entire body shined slightly with pale light, and even Assassin of Red couldn't stop herself from grimacing in response.

"…The greatest privilege of the Ruler class; Command Spells that can be used on all Servants, huh?"

This was the greatest reason that Ruler could act as a mediator. Ruler possessed two Command Spells for every Servant. In this case, that added up to a total of twenty-eight Command Spells. It was only natural that the Black faction had tried to get her as an ally.

In extreme cases, she could end the majority of Servants by ordering them to kill themselves. Of course, a Command Spell could be counteracted by another Command Spell. If she ordered Servants to kill themselves, their Masters could simply use a Command Spell of their own to stop them from killing themselves.

But that meant that two Command Spells were uselessly expended. If they kept one Command Spell in reserve to take into account the betrayal of their Servants, it actually become impossible for them to use any Command Spells afterwards.

Additionally, the faction that Ruler sided with would be able to use a sum total of four Command Spells for each Servant with Ruler's Command Spells also included. Ruler, who could overturn the superiority or inferiority of any side, was naturally a capable person that everyone wanted. Though Heroic Spirits who would fall for such temptation shouldn't be fit for the Ruler class in the first place.

"But don't bother. Even if we have to exhaust all our Command Spells, I won't betray my Master. If you order me with a Command Spell, my Master will stop it."

"…Your Master isn't your puppet, is he?"

"Of course not. No matter what my first life was like, I am now a Servant and I will selflessly support my Master."

Ruler took a step forward and spoke.

"In that case, right now you are my enemy."

Having reached here, she at last clearly confirmed that Assassin of Red and her Master were her enemies. Even Assassin of Red couldn't help turning nervous at that step.

From the beginning, the specs of Assassin and Ruler weren't even comparable. Additionally, magi had fatally bad compatibility with Ruler. Even without using a Command Spell, she could immediately defeat Assassin.

—In the first place, Assassin of Red and her Master didn't wish to fight Ruler.

What was more important was that Lancer of Red and Lancer of Black would soon come into contact to resume their battle, and that Lancer of Black's Master would become aware of the situation. She just needed to buy a few minutes of time by talking with Ruler until then.

Shirou, knowing quite well how cruel and inhumane Lancer of Black's Master Darnic Prestone Yggdmillennia was, was certain that he would definitely activate the Noble Phantasm that reproduced *that* legend if the situation became disadvantageous for Lancer of Black.

"Hoh, I see. So I am your enemy, am I? But it's unfortunate. Starting from this very moment, we must share the same interest."

"—!?"

Ruler turned around. There was no sound or disturbance of prana. But in just a few seconds, the worst possible situation would occur—she received such a revelation.

"There, you should get going now. What, I'll also help. We must oppose that together—because that's how extremely troublesome it is."

Ruler gritted her teeth slightly. But Assassin's words were correct.

Something had already been 'born' along with an enormous outpouring of prana. Something that didn't belong in the Holy Grail War and could be considered fatal.

Ruler turned her back to Assassin and began running with all her might.

***

—It was overwhelming.

"…As I thought."

"Kuh…!"

Speaking with a dispassionate voice, Lancer of Red was cornering Lancer of Black. His precision, which didn't show the slightest bit of mercy, was truly cold-hearted, suitable for a great hero.

However, the hero Vlad III, who had equally fought against him just a little bit earlier, was greatly inferior to him.

Lancer of Black himself could also sense that abnormality. He had become weaker. If his earlier self was rated 10, his current self was at best a 6.

Stakes were being created from Lancer of Black's own body. But their force and sharpness were not as great as before. Even without covering himself in flames, Lancer of Red was able to repel all of them with just his spear and armor.

"These Hanging Gardens are the domain ruled by our faction's Assassin. It's not your territory. In other words—as long as you are within these gardens, you aren't the great patriotic heroic who saved his country."

Assassin of Red's Noble Phantasm, **Hanging Gardens of Babylon**, was a fortress Noble Phantasm that ruled a defined domain. To put it another way, that place wasn't Romania where Vlad III was revered as a hero. Accordingly, the level of his fame became equal to zero.

Naturally, Lancer of Red, Karna, also had close to zero fame here. But there was a difference in basic power between Karna and Vlad III.

Even if his fame was equal to zero, as long as his legend existed somewhere in the world, Karna was unmistakably a great hero. On the other hand, outside of Romania, Vlad III was only known as a blood-sucking vampire.

Having been summoned with the characteristics of a hero, Lancer of Black's fame didn't give him any power. Rather, it inhibited his ability to display his original specs.

As he faced against Lancer of Red who wielded a spear, Lancer of Black had lost the refinement, splendor, and even sternness that he had always maintained. Only the fact that he had pride and dignity as a hero supported him.

That alone gave him to power to fight.

But it was far from enough to cut off the head of Lancer of Red.

If the fighting spirit that Lancer of Black had due to his pride as a hero weakened even slightly, the battle would end with the force and speed of an avalanche.

The two Lancers understood that very well. In that case, Lancer of Black should just retreat, turn back and run away. Though, if he could do that, he wouldn't have become a Heroic Spirit in the first place.

—*I'm going to die.*

That thought, dyed with certainty, suddenly welled up inside Lancer of Black. His defeat would naturally mean the defeat of the entire Black faction. But it couldn't be helped. He had been unable to win and had chased the enemy too far. Most of all, he had never imagined that the Greater Grail would be stolen.

If only Saber of Black was alive. He had such thoughts as well. Shame, despair, and regret threw his heart out of order like an overflowing river.

But—

It really couldn't be helped.

The moment he thought that, was certain of it, and resolved himself to it, the Master who had contracted with him appeared there as if through magic and whispered to him like a devil.

"No, we can still win. —If you release that Noble Phantasm, that is."

All the Servants present there stopped moving. The one standing there was a single Master, the head of Yggdmillennia, Darnic.

Lording over the Servants from atop a temple-like pillar some distance away from the open space where the Servants were in the midst of fighting, Darnic was strangely irritated by Lancer of Black.

But what he had said just now was a far greater problem. With a strong blow, Lancer of Black took distance from Lancer of Red and glared at his Master.

"…Darnic. What did you say to me just now?"

He wasn't playing around this time; he was radiating genuine killing intent. Receiving it coolly, the magus continued speaking even more disrespectful words.

"My lord. I said to release that Noble Phantasm. We have no chance of winning besides that."

"What are you saying!? I told you I wouldn't use that Noble Phantasm, have you forgotten!? I will die here! I will crumble away in death with regret! But that is the fate of the defeated! Darnic! I will never even consider using that and turning into an unsightly existence! Never, never!"

"You're the one who has forgotten. We must obtain the Greater Grail by any means possible! In order to turn it into a symbol and retaliate against the Association of Magi. Or to reach the Root. As a king, your wish should be fervent as well. In that case—there's no other way but to use that Noble Phantasm."

Saying that, Darnic held out one hand. On top of it were three red and shining Command Spells.

"You…!?"

As Lancer of Black widened his eyes, Darnic laughed at him and spoke in a penetratingly cold voice.

"I order you with a Command Spell. *Heroic Spirit Vlad III. Activate—your Noble Phantasm,* ***Legend of Dracula***."

"Darnic—you bastaaaaaaaaaaaard!!"

Even Lancer's shout, which was filled with the deepest hatred and despair, didn't reach Darnic.

"—I am, not, a vampire… I am, not…!"

That trembling mutter was the last of the reason of Heroic Spirit Vlad III. And then his Master Darnic smashed it into tiny pieces.

"No, *you are a vampire*. The vampire Dracula, a creature pitifully burdened with infamy due to literary works. I order you with a second Command Spell. *Continue to survive until you obtain the Greater Grail*."

Lancer of Black howled and leapt at his Master Darnic. While giving a faint smile, Darnic let himself be struck in the chest.

In the span of a second, his chest was pierced through. His body collapse. Fresh blood flew through the air and rained down on Lancer's face. And the one who laughed loudly at it—was Darnic.

"Hahahahaha! How rude of me, my Servant! As an apology, you can drink my blood! You really are a blood-sucking vampire, the king who rules the night! Your wish is unnecessary. I will bequeath you my dream, my wish, my very existence! I order you with a third Command Spell. *Engrave my existence into your soul, Lancer*!"

"Wh—at?'

Did that whisper came from one person or everyone present there? Regardless, they were all shocked by Lancer of Black killing his Master and the third order that Master had spoken with a Command Spell.

Servants could devour the souls of humans and convert them into prana. This was their privilege as spiritual beings. Humans could only transfer souls between vessels or observe them.

But this magus Darnic was an exception. He had devoted his attention to the soul which should have been impossible to convert and transform with magecraft and was useless as nourishment.

…Most likely, it was due to having fought alongside a Servant in the Third Holy Grail War. Or perhaps he had accomplished this great exploit out of fear of that prediction a certain magus had told him.

Darnic had worked out a spell to turn the souls of others into nourishment for himself… However, it was a form of curse that was exceedingly close to being taboo. It wasn't a matter of ethics. If it was for the sake of his own life, he wouldn't balk at even crushing the head of a baby.

But this spell was far too dangerous. It was risky piece of High-Thaumaturgy that, if something was off only by even a few milimeters, would instantly lead to his own death. The actual number of times he had consumed souls during the past sixty years was only three times.

He had held the ritual under as perfect conditions as conceivably possible each of those three times, but even so, the precision ratio of his body and soul had been reduced to sixty percent. 'Someone' who wasn't himself was gradually coming to rule over him little by little.

Most likely, even if he perfectly accomplished the next ritual, he would no longer be 'Darnic Prestone Yggdmillennia', but someone else instead. Even if he had his memories, even if every detail was perfectly recorded—it wouldn't be him.

In other words, for Darnic to consume the soul of Lancer, a Servant, without even conducting the ritual was nothing other than a genuine suicidal act.

After all, it was the soul of a Heroic Spirit. A vast and enormous soul of the finest quality that could activate the Greater Grail with seven of them. Therefore, it should have been impossible for a human who wasn't a [vessel] or anything else to consume such a thing.

"No way, that's impossible…!!"

That's why it was only natural for Archer of Black to murmur in shock.

"—A Command Spell. No, even with that it's impossible. Darnic… no, the current you… is neither Darnic nor Vlad III."

Lancer of Black… no, the 'person' who was neither Lancer nor Darnic smiled fearlessly.

"Exactly, Archer. Even if, with, the third, Command Spell, I took the soul of the, Heroic Spirit Vlad III into myself, to the utmost limit… it isn't possible to control a Heroic Spirit. Let alone take one into oneself."

His thin sneering voice was already difficult to distinguish between that of Darnic's or Vlad III's.

"But, but. I can engrave into it. I can engrave, my thoughts of a hundred years… my tenacity for the Holy Grail… I am no longer either Darnic or Vlad III! I am but a monster that only seeks the Holy Grail, and I don't care about being one…!"

In the first place, even if the summoning of the Heroic Spirit was accomplished using a holy relic as the foundation, their spiritual nature tended to be close to that of their Master. Darnic and Vlad III, who wanted to wipe away their disgrace and infamy… in other words, who held excessive confidence and pride in themselves, resembled each other closely on the level of the mind and soul.

Furthermore, even if it was for a short time, they had spent many days together as Master and Servant. If the binding of the third Command Spell was added to that, it became possible to even engrave the identity of [Darnic Prestone Yggdmillennia] into the tremendous soul of a Heroic Spirit.

The tenacity of this magus had, even if just slightly, surpassed that of the Heroic Spirit.

"Stop!! Stop, stop, stop, stop, please stop…!! I am the King of Wallachia, the son of Vlad II—*don't enter inside meeeeeeeeeeee*!"

Lancer of Black cried out, his form already filled with hatred. But his face was already rearranging to an extremely vague visage that was both like that of Darnic and of Vlad III. It was just like an amorphous monster.

"Now with this, you are me and I am you. My lord! No, vampire! Your power will become our shared property! Everything is for the sake of the Holy Grail! My dream, my wish will take root within you and continue on for eternity!"

Darnic Prestone Yggdmillenia. He had now become a parasite within the soul of the Heroic Spirit Vlad III with the viciously of a cancer.

"Y-You bastaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaard!!"

—*This isn't good.*

As someone who had devoted himself to [looking at others], Lancer of Red immediately drew near and tried to pierce through Lancer of Black's chest from the back with his spear. He didn't think it was cowardly; in the first place, the one who had looked away in the middle of battle was Lancer of Black.

He pierced the heart where the spiritual core was. Almost all servants would die without question at this point. Heroic Spirits who were recognized for their stamina could still remained connected to the current age even after that, but Vlad III, who had unfortunately lost his fame, wasn't such a powerful Servant.

That's right. If the Servant that Lancer of Red had stabbed was *Vlad III*, that is.

"…!!"

Lancer of Red should have definitely pierced the heart of this land's lord who had shown his defenceless back.

But he neither vanished nor even turned around. Instead of blood, a black shadowy something began leaking out from the spot he had stabbed.

Lancer of Red stared his spear and murmured.

"…I definitely felt feedback, but attacks like that have been reduced to having no effect, huh?"

"Lancer, your spear had no effect?"

Archer of Red couldn't hide her shock. Lancer's spear was a great weapon bequeathed from the gods like her bow. For it not to have any effect after being driving into an enemy Servant's spiritual core meant—

"If it was before he became a vampire, it probably would have destroyed his spiritual core like normal and killed him."

Bats gathered together and combined together into the form of a person.

"But what stands before us is not Lancer of Black, Vlad III. It is the creature known and feared throughout the world—a vampire."

Vampires called Dead Apostles existed in this world. Some slipped in among people and sucked their blood while others remained in isolation without coming into contact with anyone, but either way, Dead Apostles possessed their own unique concepts and culture and lived quietly in the shadows of the world.

Right now, the one in front of the gathered Servants wasn't such a vampire. In terms of the concept of mystery, it was only a hundred years old. But the terror of it covered the entire world. When people heard the word 'vampire', what they first thought of wasn't the Dead Apostles who hide themselves from the rest of the world, but the one who had been created using the great hero of Romania, Vlad III, as a base—the 'vampire Dracula'.

"—It's a monster."

Lancer of Red's frank feelings were agreed with by all the Servants gathered there.

Having completely regained human form, the vampire faced the Servants. There was cruelty in his eyes, but his gaze wasn't brimming with intelligence.

His elegant black aristocratic clothes were torn to shreds—and from within them, shadows with mass began to spill out instead of blood or flesh.

The spear Lancer of Black had held vanished like dust at the same time as his aspect as a hero was extinguished.

"…Now then, return my Holy Grail. I must grant my clan's dearest wish with that Greater Grail. Yes, in order to grant my longstanding desire, I must infinitely and inexhaustibly survive. I must increase my bloodline. I must gather talent, effort and a nurturing environment and give birth to those who will follow after me. So, give back the Greater Grail… give it back, give it back, give it back, give it baaaaaaaaaaaack!!"

—That shout had Darnic's selfish dream and his instincts as a vampire mixed together into it.

He had thrown away all of his humanity not for the sake of reaching the Root, but rather the preceding step to reaching the Root, to *increase one's clan*.

He had to increase his bloodline—for the sake of his clan.

He had to become stronger—for the sake of his clan.

The wish he would ask of the Greater Grail was to propagate himself, augment himself and increase himself. The man who had confused his love for his clan and his own deep-rooted and delusional convictions refused to understand how destructive his dream was.

All that was left was merely a creature that didn't hide his cruel blood-red eyes and bared his fangs. He slowly looked around as if surveying his surroundings and then focused on a single point.

This 'nameless creature' had already sniffed out the location of the Greater Grail where it had been brought into these gardens.

"Hah. Regardless, the fact that you're a monster far off from the gods doesn't change!"

Rider of Red stepped forward. Holding his hero-slaying spear in one hand, he closed the distance between himself and the vampire in an instant with his swift feet. He threw his spear at the same time as he leapt forward, and it closed in on the vampire with the speed of a bullet.

"No!"

The voice of restraint came from Archer of Black. But it was too late. The spear had already been brought to a halt.

"Wha…!?"

It was a sure-kill spear that he had thrown fast enough to surpass the sound barrier. And yet the spear that should have been close to impossible to evade had been stopped by one of the vampire's hands.

It was like grabbing a flying missile bare-handed. Naturally, his hand's flesh was torn to shreds, his nerves were snapped apart, and his bones were smashed loudly.

But the vampire's regeneration ability worked far faster than the speed at which he was wounded. Even the sight of his hand regenerating from its snapped ends looked disgusting.

The vampire laughed and jumped at Rider of Red. Having just jumped himself, Rider couldn't stop himself from being pushed down to the ground. But even so, Rider was still composed. As long as the enemy didn't have the blood of the gods, no attack would affect his body, so it was only natural he would feel that way.

The instant the vampire bared his fangs, Rider immediately held out his arm to protect himself, most likely due to his abundant accumulated battle experience and survival instincts warning him. The moment he was bitten, he felt a strange itchiness.

—Poison!?

The next instant, he was sent flying by a strong kick from Archer of Black. The fangs came out of his arm and the itchiness disappeared.

After standing up while groaning, Rider of Red protested to his teacher Archer.

"What are you doing all of a sudden, master!?"

"…It's true that attacks against you won't have any effect without the [Divinity] skill. And due to your Bravery skill, not even bewitching spells that interfere with the mind will affect you. But even without the blood of the gods, there exists ways to turn you into an *ally*."

Archer nocked an arrow on his bow and, without hesitation, fired it at the vampire who should have been his ally only minutes ago. But even after the arrow pierced him, the vampire calmly pulled it out. Not a single drop of blood came out, and his wound closed at once.

"That wasn't an attack just now, but rather the *act of blood-sucking*. It wasn't intended to kill you, but to transform you into his comrade. Your body is virtually invincible against ill will and killing intent. But it was requested that part of you be weak. Yes, in other words—"

Rider of Red's—Achilles' mother, the goddess Thetis, had tried to extinguish his human blood and turn him completely into a god by bathing him in holy flames when he was a baby. Though it had been stopped midway by her husband Peleus, his entire body except his heel became immortal.

As a result, no form of attack would have any effect on Achilles, but… that special characteristic of his had two pitfalls. First, he could be wounded by those with the blood of the gods like himself. And second, when faced not with an attack, but instead—

"…Against an act that displays friendship, my invincibility does not apply."

Rider of Red made a displeased expression as he finished Archer's explanation himself. Archer of Black nodded without smiling.

The vampire turned to face an unexpected direction with a twitch. He grimaced with displeasure and threw Rider of Red's spear from his hand. He aimed not at any of the gathered Red and Black Servants, but at a girl that had just come running here.

—There was a shining flash that seemed to tear through the darkness.

Rider of Red's spear was knocked down without reaching the girl. Her flag that fluttered in the wind was a first-rate holy weapon that could smash any kind of darkness.

"Ruler…!"

At Archer of Red's shout, everyone else turned to gaze at her. Lancer of Red, who had tried to kill her once before, was also among them, but Ruler took no notice of him—she just glared fervently at the vampire that had just been born here.

"Vlad III… no, you are a vampire, and Darnic as well…"

The vampire, who had abandoned even his existence as a Servant, couldn't be bound with Ruler's Command Spells. Lancer of Black was in a state close to vanishing, and even if she ordered him to kill himself with a Command Spell, the parasite within him, Darnic, could reject it.

Ruler had already deemed this vampire as being the greatest threat that could destroy the Holy Grail War.

He was neither a proud Heroic Spirit nor even a Servant. He was simply a 'nameless creature' that had gained the power of a vampire and lost any trace of morality.

The most troublesome part of all was his 'concept'. Even under normal circumstances, Vlad III—was mixed with the legend of Kaziklu Bey, the Lord of Impalement, and the legend of a vampire that was associated with him. It was possible that the power and fame of Vlad III would be adopted by the vampire here as well.

If he reached the Greater Grail and he was released from the Hanging Gardens… Romania would likely turn into hell in a single day.

It was something that mixed, joined and fused together history and legend. It would become a Grand Guignol masterpiece tragedy that simply slaughtered the people who dwelled in this country. Someone with a heart might call this tragedy thus.

That is————the *[Night of Wallachia]*.

Just as Assassin of Red had said, Ruler had to take him down before anything else.

"In order to safeguard the conductance of the Holy Grail War, I ask that you all temporarily join forces."

"…Hoh. So our enemy is this vampire, huh?"

Ruler nodded at Archer of Red's words.

"Yes. I request that we maintain a truce amongst each other until he is defeated. We cannot let this vampire reach the Holy Grail… Absolutely not."

The vampire seemed to wait in anticipation even as he heard those commands, simply glaring at Ruler. Ruler raised her left hand and spoke clearly.

"In the name of Ruler—of Jeanne d'Arc. I order all Servants gathered here with my Command Spells! Defeat the vampire who was once Vlad III!"

The Command Spells engraved on her left hand released an intense light. Chains of commandment coiled around Archer of Black, Caster of Black, Archer of Red, Lancer of Red and Rider of Red.

Those chains weren't an impediment if they fought the vampire—rather, they would raise the abilities of all the Servants as long as they were fighting him. But if they tried to fight the group that had temporarily joined together to oppose the vampire, their movements would dull, and the strength to wield their weapons would weaken at once.

In that case, it was obvious who they should fight. In the first place, they were heroes, men and woman of valor who fought to defeat monsters, demons and man-eating fiends.

"—Very well. I'll provide support along with Archer of Black. Rider, Lancer, you two move as you wish."

"Roger that, Nee-san. So that's how it is, Lancer."

"…I don't mind."

"Caster. Can you make shackles with golems like you did when we captured Berserker of Red?"

"It's not that I can't, but it won't work like it did with Berserker. It will only dull his movements a bit. Also, it'll be pointless if he changes form into mist or bats."

Caster of Black manipulated his fingers in the air, and ten golems started moving smoothly. One finger for each golem. With just that, the ten golems attacked the vampire, each with completely different movements.

Compared to this, the golems that had operated autonomously on the battlefield were mere puppets.

While dodging the arms that the vampire lashed out with, the golems struck at him with their bronze fists. Even after being hit by strong blows that would considerably damage even a normal Servant, he just casually counterattacked.

But now that Ruler had given an edict with her Command Spells, he had not a single ally, and everyone that stood around him was his enemy.

Rider and Lancer of Red matched their timing and attacked with each of their spears. On one hand was a hero-slaying spear bequeathed from Rider's teacher, and on the other was a spear of light that was said to be capable of even killing gods.

Furthermore, the two Archers, who boasted of talent that reached the domain of the gods, fired arrows in succession through the gaps between their two spearmen allies without minding them as they approached the enemy.

And in addition to this, Ruler, Jeanne d'Arc, was also added to their forces. She used her holy flag which the vampire was weak against and systemically knocked down the vampire's arms as he tried to extend them.

They were six in total. Six Servants who were all worthy of being called the strongest. However, there was not the slightest bit of relaxation shown on any of their faces. It wasn't in order to stop themselves from being negligent. They really were desperate.

"Kuh, he's turned into mist again—!!"

Vlad III had been summoned as Lancer of Black, and had been given the Noble Phantasm Kaziklu Bey **Lord of Execution** that came from his affinity as the Lord of Impalement as long as he was within his dominion.

By becoming a vampire and taking in Darnic, those had all been sealed away, but he had been given new weapons. The various unmatched abilities possessed by those known as vampires.

A black cloak that melted into the night and stakes that stabbed out from inside it had been summoned forth. Since they weren't summoned from the ground, there was no fear of a surprise attack, but—the stakes were thrown with the superhuman strength of a vampire, breaking the sound barrier as if it were extremely natural.

"Tch, how troublesome…!!"

Rider of Red stepped into range and rapidly snapped them away with his spear. Generally speaking, there was no one among these Servants present who could beat him in terms of speed. It was the same even if he wasn't mounted on his chariot. There was no one, either before or after his death, who had beaten the great hero Achilles of the Trojan War in speed.

Though he was one step slower than Rider, Lancer of Red was also quick-witted and agile. He smashed all the stakes that had been shooting at him since earlier.

But—at last, one of the mass-produced spears seized Lancer of Red's foot. It pierced through the top of his foot with power equal to that of a Noble Phantasm. The moment he tried to pull it out, Lancer's movements stopped slightly.

With his terrifying superhuman strength, the vampire simply hit him with a punch. Just that was enough to send Lancer flying into a wall. The damage itself was insignificant, but Lancer couldn't hide his surprise at how the vampire had overpowered him with just his overwhelming physical strength.

Rider of Red reflexively turned his gaze to the wall that Lancer had collided against. When he did that, the vampire attacked Rider as if he had intentionally aimed for that. He bared his fangs in order to suck Rider's blood and turn him into one of his kind.

Lancer of Red prevented him from doing so by throwing his spear at him.

"—Tenacity, malice, or perhaps conviction based on flawed beliefs. Neither a magus nor a hero, you are no longer anyone now. Your agony over having becoming 'something not yourself' isn't half-hearted. Don't leave any regrets or lingering attachments behind, monster. Just swiftly disappear."

It was true that, just as Lancer of Red had pointed out, the creature's agony was extraordinary.

The sensation of his very self completely disappearing. It couldn't be helped that even his own name, which could be called the foundation of a human being, felt like someone else's to him.

Who am I, what am I—even those questions faded away.

What he clung to was solely the order that had been given to him with the second Command Spell. Even when surrounded by six Servants and with his core self fading away even now, the vampire still howled loudly.

"…Ha, haha! No! As if I'll let myself die or be killed yet! No, I won't die until I obtain the Greater Grail!"

When arrows pierced him, he would turn completely into mist and bats, and on top of that would turn into a giant savage dog baring its fangs. He continuously changed his form, and his superhuman strength and claws tore through not only the golems, but even occasionally the two Archers, approaching them with speed that resembled teleportation.

—However, with all six Servants attacking him together, the situation wasn't at a disadvantage for them. Considering the battle as a whole, the Servants led by Ruler could be said to be the ones dominating in this situation. After all, it would be fine as long as they could buy time. When dawn came, the vampire's power would drop sharply. It would be easy to kill him then.

The problem was that he was trying to head towards where the Greater Grail was stored. Even while fighting, the vampire continued to remain obsessed on the Greater Grail due to the second Command Spell his Master Darnic had used and also Darnic's own will.

What should happen if he reached the Greater Grail? What would he wish for with that swirl of prana that had been accumulated over sixty years? If he had even a fragment of reason left, his wish would be definitely be the final goal of magecraft—in other words, to reach the Root.

But, if even that fragment of reason had been lost, his wish would probably be something exceedingly destructive.

—It will definitely be the latter.

And Ruler had a premonition. That he would wish for destruction with the Greater Grail. As long as the Greater Grail wasn't completely activated, there was a chance it wouldn't grant his wish, but Ruler was not so foolish as to simply hope for the best.

The six Servants split into vanguard and rear guard and continued fighting efficiently.

We can do it.

All the Servants gathered there were certain of it. It was slow going, but the speed of their attacks had started to win against the regeneration of his wounds. Even when he turned into mist, the flames from Lancer of Red's [Prana Burst] didn't give him the leisure to run away.

The vampire unleashed an attack with a hateful gaze, but it was blocked by Lancer of Red coming to the forefront. However—

Far too abruptly and without any warning, all the Red Servants fell to their knees with anguished expressions and stopped moving.

"Guh… what…!?"

"Is it, our Masters…!?"

Though it was only for an instant, their existences terribly weakened. The vampire didn't overlook that short opening and jumped over them to begin running towards the Greater Grail.

"—Wait!!"

Ruler and Archer of Black began running after him at the same time. Was the chill Ruler had felt since earlier due to fear of the vampire having his wish granted?

Casting aside such thoughts, she concentrated on running with intense speed and chasing after the vampire. Fortunately, the prana of the Greater Grail could be sensed even from here. There was no way they could miss it.

But—the vampire was fast!

"Archer of Black, stop his legs!"

At Ruler's order, Archer nocked arrows on his bow without saying anything or decelerating at all, and shot five of them in succession as strafing fire. All the arrows pierced through the vampire's legs and waist, just as he had aimed for. But then the vampire changed into bats.

His speed had dulled a little, but it hadn't managed to stop him. Shaking his head, Archer of Black focused on pursuing him.

"…Archer of Black, do you know the reason why the Red Servants stopped moving just now?"

"No. I thought the effect of your Command Spells might have worn off, but—it doesn't seem so."

Archer of Black sensed power gushing from inside his body that was separate from the prana supply from his Master. This was most likely the boost effect from Ruler's Command Spell.

Ruler was also bothered by it. Had the Red Masters disagreed with fighting together with the Black faction? …No, in that case, they would have first told their Servants. What happened just now was if—

The bats flying ahead of them were suddenly shot down one by one. Contracting lights like fine threads were shot one after another from far down the hallway ahead.

"Kuh… so she doesn't care if they hit us either!"

However, those lights were also inevitably strafing Ruler and Archer who were chasing after the vampire. The shooter, Assassin of Red, probably didn't take that into account at all. She seemed to think that her own power alone was enough to take down the vampire.

But that was negligent. The bats returned to the form of the vampire once more and, even with his entire body being torn apart by the lights, he regained his speed by prioritizing the regeneration of his feet alone.

Rather than running, he simply advanced forward determinedly by repeatedly crashing into walls like a flexible ball. Eventually, the vampire found a door. If he passed through it, he would find what he sought there. The almighty wish-granting device that would release the violent emotions gushing inside his chest was behind that door.

—Just a little more, and my wish will be granted.

Three Servants, consisting of Berserker of Black, Berserker of Red and Saber of Black, should already be stored in the Lesser Grail. Saber of Black had been re-summoned due to a miraculous phenomenon, but that was still two Servants collected in the Lesser Grail. If it was a small-scale wish—in other words, as long as it wasn't a wish as great as wishing for the world itself to change and transform, he should be able to forcefully activate the Greater Grail and have it grant his wish.

The propagation, augmentation and supplementation of his flesh. There should be no problem with a wish of that level.

Darnic Prestone Yggdmillennia. That name already seemed like that of someone else to him now.

But he understood that that man had sought the Holy Grail and he was now here at the end of that search. So—rejoice, Darnic. Your wish will soon be granted!

He opened the door without hesitating for an instant, and there lay precisely what he wished for. The broad stairway of sun-dried bricks before his eyes headed straight down and, at the bottom there was a gigantic structure standing there that seemed to pierce through the top floor of the building it was contained it.

Filled with pale white light, it was the almighty wish-granting device—Fuyuki's Greater Grail.

"—Ah."

He had stolen the march on not only many Servants, but even Ruler. The vampire had reached it at last. Now he just had to forcefully activate the Greater Grail and grant his wish…

"That's far enough, Darnic Prestone Yggdmillennia."

A person stood halfway down the steps to the Greater Grail. Judging that it was a Master and not a Servant, the vampire had decided to kill him.

But he reflexively came to a stop when he heard those words, as if held back by them. Though it would have been better to just go down and kill him without breaking a sweat, 'something' about that voice bothered him.

"…Who are you?"

At the sound of the person's footsteps, the vampire reflexively drew back. He felt a chill. His instincts were telling him that he mustn't meet with the person in front of him. It was a bomb. The fuse had already been lit and a shattering explosion was less than a few seconds away.

Standing before the vampire was a tanned-skinned youth. He wore a gentle smile and declared thus solemnly.

"Or perhaps I should call you the remains of Darnic. I honestly admire that tenacity of yours. But I'll never hand over the Holy Grail to you. Much less now that you've been reduced to a vampire."

It exploded. Within Darnic were memories of the past that he absolutely wouldn't forget even if he forgot his own name. The Third Holy Grail War that he had desperately fought to the bitter

end in as a magus—he would absolutely never forget that battle which had been the start of everything.

That's why he was shocked now.

"…That's, impossible."

"Oh my. Those are truly banal words, coming from you, Darnic. Since you managed to survive, then there's nothing to be surprised about *me surviving as well*."

"That's, impossible! No way! Why!? *Why are you here!?* Why are you still alive…!?"

The youth shrugged his shoulders and spoke in a very aloof manner.

"—Naturally, it's because I'm participating in this Great Holy Grail War. As a Master of the Red faction."

It was an absolutely impossible declaration to the vampire. Ignoring the speechlessness of vampire, the youth shouted in an increasingly louder voice.

"I've waited for this moment, Darnic! Fuyuki's Greater Grail belongs to *me*! Whether you be a magus or a vampire—I will never hand over this Greater Grail to the likes of you who can do nothing but drive the world to destruction!"

At those words, the vampire was freed from the shackles of fear that had unconsciously bound him.

"…Don't screw with meeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!!"

Enraged, the vampire took a step forward to rush at him—and fell down in an ungainly manner.

"Guh…!?"

When he looked down, something sharp and pointed was stabbed into his knees. These were the thrown-type Conceptual Weapons that was favored by agents of the Church—[Black Keys].

"You are a vampire. Unfortunately, vampires must also have various weaknesses as compensation for their unmatched strength. Sunshine weakens them, and they were weak against holy symbols. And—they are also weak against weapons meant for purification like Black Keys."

Yes, what the youth said was certainly correct. A Church agent's Black Keys were Conceptual Weapons strong enough to purify Dead Apostles.

But the power of his Black Keys was far too extraordinary… no, *abnormal*.

Coolly and solemnly, the tanned-skin youth spoke in praise of another.

"No, compared to Ruler who was chasing you, someone like me is worthless. I'm just a worthless, unacknowledged *sham of a saint*. However, I have enough power to pulverize your current self."

His red holy shroud fluttered, and silver blades flew out. The Black Keys stabbed around the vampire, suppressing any counterattack, and the youth grabbed the vampire's face.

The youth's presence suddenly transformed. He was no longer a Master now, but someone different. Yes, this was the one who had fought to the death against the Servant Darnic had summoned in the past—

"Then, it's time for prayer. —Nameless vampire."

"I will kill. I will let live. I will harm and heal. None will escape me. None will escape my sight."

The vampire shrieked and struggled with his limbs.

But the hands grasping him tightened on the face of the vampire as if in a vice.

"Be crushed. I welcome those who have grown old and those who have lost. Devote yourself to me, learn from me, and obey me. Rest. Do not forget song, do not forget prayer, and do not forget me. I am light and relieve you of all your burdens."

The youth quickly lifted the vampire up the stairs and dashed through the hallway while still holding him. Physical strength wasn't an issue here. This was a clash of conviction and faith.

So there was no way that this 'unknown person', who had been reduced to a vampire, could match this youth's faith that was as hard as steel and as sharp as a sword.

—His existence was being erased with just a few words. The Greater Grail that should have been in reach of his hand just earlier was getting further and further away before his eyes. It filled him with regret.

"Do not pretend. Retribution for forgiveness, betrayal for trust, despair for hope, darkness for light, dark death for the living."

The youth's dark and ageless eyes, together with the chant, stabbed into the vampire like a blade. It was an extraordinarily powerful Baptism Rite that wasn't possible for a human.

—And why did he have to be killed by him of all people? The vampire could understand if it was a Servant. He would be tormented by regret if it were a Master. But this was *too incomprehensible*. A meteorite crashing into his head would be more understandable than this.

"Relief is in my hands. I will add oil to your sins and leave a mark. Eternal life is given through death. ——Ask for forgiveness here. I, the incarnation, will swear."

—Ah, ah, ah! My Holy Grail, my illusion[dream]*! My Holy Grail! My wish*[dream]*! It's still unfulfilled, unfulfilled, unfulfilled!!*[3]

The vampire was banged against a door as he was pushed along. Not minding the details, the youth simply continued running forward at full speed. The door was smashed apart and the youth stepped inside. The room was a chapel. The youth ran through the chapel's nave—and, in the presence of god, he spoke the final holy words with a gaze filled with compassion and pity.

—But why?

"Kyrie Eleison: I grant compassion onto this soul."

The entire body of the [nameless monster], who had once been a devout believer and king of a land and who had also once been a magus before becoming no one in the end, began to emit white smoke. He was melting. Not his flesh, but his very existence was melting away.

While leaving behind moans of regret and gasps of despair, the vampire evaporated away right down to the final fragment of himself. The hero who saved his homeland and the leader of a clan who commanded many magi were already dead.

The past kings were dead, and the current king raised a loud song of victory.

And it was then that Ruler and the other Servants that had been chasing the vampire stepped into the chapel.

"Here.....!?"

Strangely enough, those two met in a chapel, a place suitable for the two of them. The vampire, having melted away in the center of the chapel nave, no longer moved or spoke. He had evaporated away. His soul had returned to where it should be.

Standing calmly beside his corpse was a youth. He had tanned skin and white hair like silver, and he wore a red stole and mantle over his cassock.

The instant she saw him, Ruler *understood everything*.

"…No, way."

Because she understood, she gasped. Impossible, it couldn't be. The youth in front of her—was a *Servant*. No, if it were just that, it would be fine. A Master being a Servant deviated from the rules, but at the very least, it would be a conceivable possibility.

But the problem was his class. He wasn't Saber, Archer, Lancer, Rider, Berserker, Caster or Assassin.

"—How do you do? Ruler of *this* war."

"…A sixteenth Servant…!?"

Even the calm and collected Archer of Black couldn't hide his surprise. The same went for the Red Servants who had arrived after frantically following behind Archer and Ruler.

The youth they had thought was a Master was definitely openly exposing the spiritual nature of a Servant from himself.

"I'm not the sixteenth, Chiron. The sixteenth is Ruler beside you. Strictly speaking, I am the *first Servant*."

"Master of Assassin… What have you done to our Masters!?"

In response to Archer of Red's enraged question, the youth chuckled and held up one arm, rolling back the sleeve covering it. Everyone gasped as they looked at it.

Engraved on it was all the respective Command Spells for Archer of Red, Lancer of Red, Rider of Red, Berserker of Red, Caster of Red and Assassin of Red—eighteen Command Spells in total.

"I peacefully had them turn over their rights as Masters and each of their three Command Spells. Don't worry, the prana necessary to keep you all in this world is a trivial amount to supply now that I'm connected to the Greater Grail."

"Peacefully—?"

The youth nodded at the murmur spoken by someone, and spoke while glancing at Lancer of Red.

"After all, our faction's Lancer is a hero of charity who excels at seeing through people's lies. That's why I had to have things proceed according to our plan without lying as much as possible. The reason I purposefully had my orders conveyed via your Masters was for the sake of that. Yes, your Masters didn't lie. They think that they gave directions according to their own judgement… even now."

"—Yes. What I sensed, what God warned me of was you, I see now."

"I wonder about that. I have no intention of defying God, though."

Even without thinking deeply about it, everything about Jeanne d'Arc's summoning had strange from the beginning. A possession summoning by borrowing a human's body. At first she had thought it was because this war had an unprecedented summoning of fourteen Servants, but when she thought about it, it was the opposite. If it was a situation where it was inevitable that chaos and mayhem would be caused by fourteen Servants, the Greater Grail would have correctly accomplished Ruler's summoning at all costs.

The reason it couldn't do so was because the Greater Grail's identity recognition was confused by the absolutely impossible situation of there being two Rulers existing at once.

In that case, it was obvious that it would be confused how to properly summon the one being summoned second. And the reason this priest had run away from her was also because she was Ruler. Because of the skill that Ruler possessed as one of her privileges—[True Name Discernment].

This skill, which exposed the class and true names of other Servants, was naturally effective even on Servants that had achieved incarnation. In the worst case scenario, if he had met her on the battlefield, the youth's plan would have failed.

"You are… *the Ruler who was summoned in the Third Holy Grail War in Fuyuki*."

Every Servant gathered there gasped at Ruler's words.

"Yes. It would have been troublesome if I met you face-to-face before I became their official Master. After all, you have Command Spells. If you realized who I was, everything would have come to nothing, right? I won't let you get in the way of my dream."

There was no hatred in the youth's voice. But there was a resolute will in it. Persuading him was impossible, and this youth wouldn't stop unless he was killed—Ruler was certain of that.

Ruler gazed at the youth with her amethyst-like eyes, and called him by his name.

"—What is your objective, Amakusa Shirou Tokisada?"

"That's obvious. It's the salvation of all humanity, Jeanne d'Arc."

The boy and the girl were famed and extolled for creating 'miracles' by the unrewarded masses and the soldiers who chased after their backs.

Unable to forgive each other's existence, they quietly glared at each other.

Afterword

—Let me tell you about a certain man.

From the time we first met, he was connected to pathology.

Dual pistols, doves, the church. Zombies, chainsaws, bloodbaths.

Other people scorn those dumb things. He rejoices at those dumb things.

Satisfaction, doting, dead drunk, climaxes.

The reason for such slovenly taste is because of this good-for-nothing business where karma comes back to bite you.

But well, it's not such an unusual thing.

Coveting B-rated material of bad taste is the taste of otakus.

Of course, I'm talking about Higashide Yuuichirou. And I'm also reminiscing about the past.

The time was truly right at the end of the century. Though I say that, society wasn't in the midst of decay, freedom and violence and it wasn't such a crazy time, but in any case, we met at the dawn of the stagnant internet.

The trigger for our encounter with it was a certain game maker. In other words, the company that made the works with "Did the radios waves reach?", "I will kill you", "Hawawa~" (*Not referring to Koumei from Koihime Musou) and, though the work for this still hadn't been published back then, "I slept with Touya-kun". Well, in short, the game company Leaf. It was a series of short stories derived from their works. We had each written a piece at the time that we met.

The reason to why I've stuck with him this long is probably because our interests match—it wouldn't be wrong to say that, but I feel that's not accurate either. For instance, I had no interest in B-rated movies (especially horror). The reason I was tainted is 100% Higashide Yuuichirou's fault. He's just like a priest of joy and pleasure.

By the way, at the end of last year as well, he brought me to see the movie [Cabin] without any prior explanation at all (moreover, it was the English-version), so there's absolutely no difference in what he does now fifteen years after we first met. What is he doing at Christmas?

Well, getting back to the main subject. As for why I've stuck with him this long, well, at the very least, I personally think that it's because Higashide Yuuichirou is an extremely interesting man. And the greatest proof of this is the existence of this book.

And so everyone, it'd what you've all been waiting for! Scattering both sparks and the flowers of life through the air! Crossing weapons, tragedy and comedy! The second volume of the Great Holy Grail War! Delivered more brilliantly and grandly than ever!

…Or rather, it's more like, you know. The author himself said it in the first volume's afterword, but the book really conveys the feeling that he enjoyed writing it.

—Yeah, he hasn't changed at all. Just like back then, he writes what he truly likes truly as he likes to. That is Higashide Yuuichirou's [Origin].

This work is like a love letter to the story. As long as he doesn't lose sight of his [Origin] of [Like], he will never be betrayed by the story. Both the feelings of the author and the feelings of the readers will one day reach the Cup of Heaven.

Like how his feelings from back then have bloomed and born fruit now like this.

—Just before the end of the century. The month of December in the year 2000.

A certain doujin game sent waves of agitation through the world.

[Tsukihime].

It was produced by an amateur group known as Type Moon.

I was wrapped up within that frenzy, and naturally, so was Higashide Yuuichirou.

It was something he [liked]. That's why he definitely wanted to write up his love for this story in some form.

Of course, there was no way of knowing back then that Higashide Yuuichirou's [Fate/Apocrypha] would be born.

But well, it was definitely at that moment. The decisive turning point of his life.

In other words.

—That day, the good-for-nothing Higashide Yuuichirou encountered fate.

TYPE-MOON BOOKS

定価：本体1300円(税込)

かつて、冬木と呼ばれる街では七人の魔術師と英霊たちによる聖杯戦争が執り行われていた。だが、第二次世界大戦の混乱に乗じて、とある魔術師が聖杯を強奪。

数十年が経ち、その聖杯を象徴（シンボル）に掲げたユグドミレニア一族は魔術協会からの離反、組織の独立を宣言。怒れる魔術協会は刺客を送り込むが、彼らが召喚したサーヴァントによって返り討ちに遭う。

サーヴァントに対抗するにはサーヴァント。聖杯戦争のシステムが変更され、七騎対七騎という空前絶後の規模の戦争――聖杯大戦が勃発。

一方、聖杯大戦の審判として十五人目のサーヴァント――ジャンヌ・ダルクが召喚される。彼女は自分が召喚されたことへの疑念を抱きながらも、舞台となる街トゥリファスへと赴くが……。

「Fate/stay night」「Fate/Zero」とは異なる新しいFateの世界、外典（アポクリファ）の聖杯戦争、ここに開幕！